

## THE TWA SISTERS OF BINNÓRIE

“ O sister, I'll not reach my hand,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*  
And I'll be heir of all your land,”  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

35

“ O sister, reach me but your glove,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*  
And sweet William shall be your love,”  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

40

“ Sink on, nor hope for hand nor glove,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*  
And sweet William shall be my love,”  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

45

Sometimes she sank, sometimes she swam,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*  
Until she cam to the miller's dam,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

Out then cam the miller's son,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*  
And saw the fair maid swimmin' in,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

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“ O father, father, draw your dam !  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie,*  
There's either a mermaid or milk-white swan,”  
*By the bonnie milldar'* *—nórie.*

55  
3.

## ANONYMOUS

The miller hasted and drew his dam,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie!*  
And there he found a drown'd woman,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

You couldna see her yellow hair,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie!*  
For gowd and pearls that were sae rare,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

You couldna see her fingers sma',  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie!*  
Wi' diamond rings they were cover'd a',  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

And by there cam a harper fine,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie!*  
That harpit to the king at dine,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

And when he look'd that lady on,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie!*  
He sigh'd and made a heavy moan,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

He's ta'en three locks o' her yellow hair,  
*Binnórie, O Binnórie!*  
And wi' them strung his harp so rare,  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

## THE TWA SISTERS OF BINNÓRIE

He brought it to her father's hall,

*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*

And there was the court assembled all,

*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

He laid his harp upon a stane,

85

*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*

And straight it began to play by lane,<sup>1</sup>

*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

" O yonder sits my father, the King,

*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*

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And yonder sits my mother, the Queen,

*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

" And yonder stands my brother Hugh,

*Binnórie ! O Binnórie !*

And by him my William, sweet and true,"

95

*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

But the last tune that the harp play'd then,

*Binnórie, O Binnórie !*

Was, " Woe to my sister, false Hélén ! "

*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnórie.*

100

*Anonymous*

<sup>1</sup> *Alone, i.e. of its own accord.*

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

CHAUCER has often been called "The Father of English Poetry." He is, indeed, the first of the "modern" poets. The poetry before his time belongs in language, style, and theme to another age than ours. He is the first considerable poet whose language we can read at sight ; and he himself helped to fix the form and dialect of our modern tongue. In his work the old alliterative metre of O. and M.E has given way to rhythm and rhyme : many of the *Canterbury Tales* are written in the most familiar of English metres—the decasyllabic couplet. Moreover, his subject is modern. The song or lyric remains essentially constant in all ages of poetry ; and with that Chaucer is not concerned at all in the *Canterbury Tales*. But he is concerned with narrative. To the writing of narrative poetry he brought a new mind, fresh, free, and unshackled like the new world which in his days was beginning to emerge from the old. People live in his stories. There is nowhere in English poetry so marvellous a band of men as that chattering company which met at the Tabard Inn. He saw them, as it were, at first hand, and left them for all time on the gay journey to St. Thomas's shrine. We hear them still ; see the wimpled prioress, the fat monk, the lean clerk, the miller "full big of braun," the poor parson and the simple ploughman who "was his brother." The Prologue is no mere narrative ; no mere description. It has a chuckle in it, a wealth of satire, and now and then a depth of pathos.

And in the stories themselves the poet does

## GEOFFREY CHAUCER, c. 1340-1400

Thise ryotoures<sup>1</sup> three, of whiche I telle,  
Longe erst er<sup>2</sup> pryme<sup>3</sup> rong of any belle,  
Were set hem in a taverne for to drinke ;  
And as they satte, they herde a belle clinke  
Biform a cors, was caried to his grave ;      5  
That oon of hem gan callen to his knave,  
“ Go bet,”<sup>4</sup> quod he, “ and axe redily,  
What cors is this that passeth heer forby ;  
And look that thou reporte his name wel.”

“ Sir,” quod this boy, “ it nedeth never-a-del.

It was me told, er ye cam heer, two houres ;      11  
He was, pardee, an old felawe of youres ;  
And sodeynly he was y-slayn to-night,  
For-dronke,<sup>5</sup> as he sat on his bench upright ;  
Ther cam a privee theef, men clepeth Deeth,      15  
That in this contree al the peple sleeth,  
And with his spere he smoot his herte a-two,  
And wente his wey with-outen wordes mo.  
He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence :  
And, maister, er ye come in his presence,      20  
Me thinketh that it were necessarie  
For to be war of swich an adversarie :

<sup>1</sup> *ryotoures* : rioters, roysterers.

<sup>2</sup> *erst er* : before.

<sup>3</sup> *pryme* : the first hour of the Divine Service (about 6 a.m.).

<sup>4</sup> *knav* : boy, servant.

<sup>5</sup> *go bet* : go quickly.

<sup>6</sup> *for-dronke* : dead drunk.

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

Beth<sup>1</sup> redy for to mete him evermore.  
Thus taughte me my dame, I sey na-more."  
" By seinte Marie," seyde this taverner, 25  
" The child seith sooth, for he hath slayn this  
yeer ;

Henne<sup>2</sup> over a myle, with-in a greet village.  
Both man and womman, child and hyne,<sup>3</sup> and  
page.

I trowe his habitacioun be there ;  
To been avysed greet wisdom it were, 30  
Er that he dide a man a dishonour."  
" Ye, goddes armes," quod this ryotour,  
" Is it swich peril with him for to mete ?  
I shal him seke by wey and eek by strete,  
I make avow to goddes digne bones ! 35  
Herkneth, felawes, we three been al ones<sup>4</sup> ;  
Lat ech of us holde up his hond til<sup>5</sup> other,  
And ech of us bicomen otheres brother,  
And we wol sleen this false traytour Deeth ;  
He shal be slayn, which that so many sleeth, 40  
By goddes dignitee, er it be night."

Togidres han thise three her trouthes plight,  
To live and dyen ech of hem for other,  
As though he were his owene y-boren brother.

<sup>1</sup> beth : be (imperative). Note that imperatives generally end in -th; cf. herkneth (line 36).

<sup>2</sup> henne : hence.

<sup>3</sup> hyne : peasant, hind.

<sup>4</sup> al ones : " all at one," i.e. of one mind.

<sup>5</sup> til : to.

And up they sterte al dronken, in this rage, 4  
 And forth they goon towards that village,  
 Of which the taverner had spoke biforn,  
 And many a grisly ooth than han they sworn,  
 And Cristes blessed body they to-rente<sup>1</sup>—  
 “ Deeth shal be deed, if that they may hir  
 hente.”<sup>2</sup> 5

Whan they han goon nat fully half a myle,  
 Right as they wolde han troden over a style,  
 An old man and a povre with hem mette.  
 This olde man ful mekely hem grette,  
 And seyde thus, “ now, lordes, god yow see ! ”<sup>3</sup> 5

The proudest of thise ryotoures three  
 Answerde agayn, “ what ? carl,<sup>4</sup> with sor  
 grace,  
 Why artow<sup>5</sup> al forwrapped save thy face ?  
 Why livestow so longe in so greet age ? ”

This olde man gan loke in his visage,  
 And seyde thus, “ for I ne can nat finde  
 A man, though that I walked in-to Inde,  
 Neither in eitee nor in no village,  
 That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age ;  
 And therfore moot I han myn age stille,  
 As longe time as it is goddes wille.

<sup>1</sup> *to-rente* : toro asunder (i.e. with their “ grisly oaths

<sup>2</sup> *hente* : seized.

<sup>3</sup> *god yow see I* : may God see you ! i.e. God bless ye

<sup>4</sup> *carl* : churl.

<sup>5</sup> *artow* : = art thou (cf. *livestow* in line 59).

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

Ne deeth, allas ! ne<sup>1</sup> wol nat han my lyf ;  
 Thus walke I, lyk a restlees caityf,  
 And on the ground, which is my modres gate,  
 I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late, 70  
 And seye, ‘ leve moder, leet me in !  
 Lo, how I vanish, flesh, and blood, and skin !  
 Allas ! whan shul my bones been at reste ?  
 Moder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste,<sup>2</sup>  
 That in my chambre longe tyme hath be, 75  
 Ye ! for an heyre clout to wrappe me !’  
 But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,  
 For which ful pale and welked is my face.

But, sirs, to yow it is no curteisye  
 To speken to an old man vileinye, 80  
 But he trespassse in worde, or elles in dede.  
 In holy writ ye may your-self wel rede,  
 ‘ Agayns an old man, hoor upon his heed,  
 Ye sholde aryse’ ; wherfor I yeve yow reed,<sup>3</sup>  
 Ne dooth un-to an old man noon harm now, 85  
 Na-more than ye wolde men dide to yow  
 In age, if that ye so longe abyde ;  
 And god be with yow, wher ye go or ryde.  
 I moot go thider as I have to go.’

“ Nay, olde cherl, by god, thou shalt nat  
 so,”

<sup>1</sup> *ne . . . ne* : a double negative is always emphatic in Chaucer, as in Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> *chaunge my cheste* : change my clothes (chest = wardrobe). He means to change his clothes for a shroud.

<sup>3</sup> *reed* : advice.

Seyde this other hasardour anon ; 91  
" Thou partest nat so lightly, by saint John<sup>1</sup>  
Thou spak right now of thilke<sup>1</sup> traitour Deeth,  
That in this contree alle our frendes sleeth.  
Have heer my trouthe, as thou art his aspye, 95  
Tel wher he is, or thou shalt it abyte,  
By god, and by the holy sacrament !  
For soothly thou art oon of his assent,  
To sleep us yonge folk, thou false theef ! "

"Now, sirs," quod he, "if that yow be so leef  
To finde Deeth, turne up this crooked wey, 101  
For in that grove I lafte him, by my fey,  
Under a tree, and ther he wol abyde ;  
Nat for your boost he wol him no-thing hyde.  
See ye that ook ? right ther ye shul him finde. 105  
God save yow, that boghte agayn mankinde,  
And yow amende !"—thus seyde this olde man.  
And everich of thise ryotoures ran,  
Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde  
Of florins fyne of golde y-coyned rounde 110  
Wel ny an eighte busshels, as hem thoughte.<sup>2</sup>  
No lenger thanne after Deeth they soughte,  
But ech of hem so glad was of that sighte,  
For that the florins been so faire and brighte,  
That doun they sette hem by this precious  
hord.

The worste of hem he spake the firste word. 116

<sup>1</sup> *thislike*: the ilke = the same.

<sup>2</sup> as hem thoughte : as it seemed to them.

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

“ Brethren,” quod he, “ tak kepe what I seye ;  
 My wit is greet, though that I bourde<sup>1</sup> and pleye.  
 This tresor hath fortune un-to us yiven,  
 In mirthe and jolitee our lyf to liven,      120  
 And lightly as it comth, so wol we spende.  
 Ey ! goddes precious dignitee ! who wende<sup>2</sup>  
 To-day, that we sholde han so fair a grace ?  
 But mighte this gold be caried fro this place  
 Hoom to myn hous, or elles un-to youres—      125  
 For wel ye woot<sup>3</sup> that al this gold is oures—  
 Than were we in heigh felicitee.  
 But trewely, by daye it may nat be ;  
 Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge,  
 And for our owene tresor doon us honge.      130  
 This tresor moste y-caried be by nighte  
 As wysly and as slyly as it mighte.  
 Wherfore I rede that cut<sup>4</sup> among us alle  
 Be drawe, and lat see wher the cut wol falle ;  
 And he that hath the cut with herte blythe      135  
 Shal renne to the toune, and that ful swythe,  
 And bringe us breed and wyn ful prively.  
 And two of us shul kopen subtilly  
 This tresor wel ; and, if he wol nat tarie,  
 Whan it is night, we wol this tresor carie      140  
 By oon assent, wher-as us thinketh best.”  
 That oon of hem the cut broughte in his fest,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *bourde* : jest, joke.

<sup>4</sup> *cut* : lot (cf. *cut* in cards).

<sup>2</sup> *wende* : thought.

<sup>5</sup> *fest* : fist, hand.

<sup>3</sup> *woot* : know.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, c. 1340-1400

And bad hem drawe, and loke wher it wol falle ;  
And it fel on the yongeste of hem alle ;  
And forth toward the toun he wente anon. 145  
And al-so sone as that he was gon.

That oon of hem spak thus un-to that other,  
“ Thou knowest wel thou art my sworne brother,  
Thy profit wol I telle thee anon.

Thou woost wel that our felawe is agen ; 150  
And heer is gold, and that ful greet plentee,  
That shal departed been among us thre.  
But natholes, if I can shape it so  
That it departed were among us two,  
Hadde I nat doon a frendes torn to thee ? ” 155

That other answerde, “ I noot<sup>1</sup> how that may  
be ;

He woot how that the gold is with us tweye.  
What shal we doon, what shal we to him seye ? ”

“ Shal it be conseil ? ” seyde the firste shrewe,  
“ And I shal tellen thee, in wordes fewe, 160  
What we shal doon, and bringe it wel aboute.”

“ I graunte,” quod that other, “ out of doute,  
That, by my trouthe, I wol thee nat biwreye.”

“ Now,” quod the firste, “ thou woost wel we  
be tweye,

And two of us shul strenger be than oon. 165  
Look whan that he is set, and right anoon  
Arys, as though thou woldest with him pleye ;  
And I shal ryve him thurgh the sydes tweye

<sup>1</sup> *noot* : = ne woot, know not.

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

Whyl that thou strogelest with him as in game,  
And with thy dagger look thou do the same ; 170  
And than shal al this gold departed be,  
My dere freend, bitwixen me and thee ;  
Than may we bothe our lustes<sup>1</sup> al fulfille,  
And pleye at dees<sup>2</sup> right at our owene wille.”  
And thus accorded been thise shrewes<sup>3</sup> tweye 175  
To sleep the thridde, as ye han herd me seye.

This yongest, which that wente un-to the toun,  
Ful ofte in herte he rolleth up and doun  
The beautee of thise florins newe and brighte.  
“ O lord ! ” quod he, “ if so were that I mighe  
Have al this tresor to my-self allone, 181  
Ther is no man that liveth under the trone  
Of god, that sholde live so mery as I ! ”  
And atte laste the feend, our enemy,  
Putte in his thought that he shold poyson heye,  
With which he mighe sleep his felawes tweye ;  
For-why<sup>4</sup> the feend fond him in swich lyvinge,  
That he had leve him to sorwe bringe,  
For this was outrely his fulle entente  
To sleep hem bothe, and never to repente. 190  
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he tarie,  
Into the toun, un-to a pothecarie,  
And preyed him, that he him wolde selle  
Som poyson, that he mighe his ratten quelle<sup>5</sup> ;

<sup>1</sup> *lustes* : desires.

<sup>4</sup> *for-why* : because.

<sup>2</sup> *dees* : dice.

<sup>5</sup> *quelle* : kill.

<sup>3</sup> *shrewes* : villains.

And eek ther was a polcat in his hawe,<sup>1</sup> 195  
 That, as he seyde, his capouns hadde y-slawe,  
 And sayn he wolde wreke him, if he myghte,  
 On vermin, that destroyed him by nighte.

The pothecharie answerde, " and thou shalt have  
 A thing that, al-so god my soule save, 200  
 In al this world ther nis no creature,  
 That etc or dronke hath of this confiture  
 Noght but the mountance of a corn of whete,  
 That he ne shal his lyf anon forlete ;<sup>2</sup>  
 Ye, sterre<sup>3</sup> he shal, and that in lasse whyle 205  
 Than thou wolt goon a paas<sup>4</sup> nat but a myle ;  
 This poyon is so strong and violent."

This cursed man hath in his hond y-hent  
 This poyon in a box, and sith<sup>5</sup> he ran  
 In-to the nexte strete, un-to a man, 210  
 And borwed [of] him large botels three ;  
 And in the two his poyon poured he ;  
 The thridde he kepte clene for his drinke.  
 For al the night he shoop him<sup>6</sup> for to swinke<sup>7</sup>  
 In caryinge of the gold out of that place. 215  
 And whan this ryotour, with sory grace,  
 Had filled with wyn his grete botels three,  
 To his felawes agayn repaireth he.

<sup>1</sup> *hawe* : farm-yard.

<sup>2</sup> *forlete* : let go, forfeit.

<sup>3</sup> *sterre* : die.

<sup>4</sup> *goon a paas* : " go apace," i.e. simply, walk.

<sup>5</sup> *sith* : then.

<sup>6</sup> *shoop him* : " shaped himself," i.e. prepared himself.

<sup>7</sup> *swinke* : labour, work.

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

What nedeth it to sermone of it more ?  
For right as they had east his deeth bisore, 220  
Right so they han him slayn, and that anon.  
And whan that this was doon, thus spak that oon,  
" Now lat us sitte and drinke, and make us merie,  
And afterward we wol his body berie."  
And with that word it happed him, par ens,<sup>1</sup> 225  
To take the botel ther the poyson was,  
And drank, and yaf his felawe drinke also,  
For which anon they storven hothe two.

But, certes, I suppose that Avicen<sup>2</sup>  
Wroot never in no canon, ne in no sen, 230  
Mo wonder signes of empoisoning  
Than hadde thise wrecches two, er hir ending.  
Thus ended been thise homicydes two,  
And cek the false empoysoner also.

O cursed sinne, ful of cursednesse ! 235  
O traytours homicyde, o wikkednesse !  
O glotonye, luxurie, and hasardrye !  
Thou blasphemour of Crist with vileinye  
And othes grete, of usage and of pryde !  
Allas ! mankinde, how may it bityde, 240  
That to thy creatour which that thee wroghte,  
And with his precious herte-blood thee boghite,

<sup>1</sup> *par ens* : by chance.

<sup>2</sup> *Avicen* : an Arab physician who wrote *The Canon of Medicine*, each section of which was called in Arabic a *sen* (line 230).

Thou art so fals and so unkinde, allas !

Now, goode men, god forgeve yow your  
trespas,

And ware yow fro the sinne of avaryce. 245

Myn holy pardoun may yow alle waryce,<sup>1</sup>

So that<sup>2</sup> ye offre nobles or sterlinges,

Or elles silver broches, spones, ringes.

Boweth your heed under this holy bulle !

Cometh up, ye wyves, offreth of your wolle!<sup>3</sup> 250

Your name I entre heer in my rolle anon ;

In-to the blisse of hevene shul ye gon ;

I yow assoile,<sup>4</sup> by myn heigh power,

Yow that wol offre, as clene and eek as cleer

As ye were born ; and, lo, sirs, thus I preche. 255

And Jesu Crist, that is our soules leche,<sup>5</sup>

So graunte yow his pardon to receyve ;

For that is best ; I wol yow nat deceyve.

But sirs, o<sup>6</sup> word forgat I in my tale,

I have relikes and pardon in my male,<sup>6</sup> 260

As faire as any man in Engelond,

Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.

If any of yow wol, of devocioun,

Offren, and han myn absoluicioun,

Cometh forth anon, and kneleth heer adoun, 265

And mekely receyveth my pardoun :

<sup>1</sup> waryce : heal, cure.

<sup>2</sup> so that : as lon g as.

<sup>3</sup> assoile : absolve.

<sup>4</sup> leche : physician.

<sup>5</sup> o : one.

<sup>6</sup> male : bag, trunk (cf. Royal Mail).

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

Or elles, taketh pardon as ye wende,  
 Al newe and fresh, at every tounes ende,  
 So that ye offren alwey newe and newe  
 Nobles and pens,<sup>1</sup> which that be gode and trewe.  
 It is an honour to everich that is heer,      271  
 That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoneer  
 T'assouille yow, in contree as ye ryde,  
 For aventures which that may bityde.  
 Peraventure ther may falle oon or two      275  
 Doun of his hors, and breke his nekke atwo.  
 Look which a seuretee is it to yow alle  
 That I am in your felaweship y-falle,  
 That may assouille yow, bothe more and lasse,  
 Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe. 280  
 I rede that our hoste heer shal biginne,  
 For he is most envoluped in sinne.  
 Com forth, sir hoste, and offre first anon,  
 And thou shalt kisse the reliks everichon,  
 Ye, for a grote ! unbokel anon thy purs."      285  
 " Nay, nay," quod he, " than have I Cristes  
 curs ! "

This pardoner answerde nat a word ;  
 So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye.  
 " Now," quod our host, " I wol no lenger pleye  
 With thee, ne with noon other angry man." 290  
 But right anon the worthy Knight bigan,  
 Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,

<sup>1</sup> pens : pence.

EDMUND SPENSER, c. 1552-1599

"Na-more of this, for it is right y-nough ;  
Sir Pardoner, be glad and mery of chere ;  
And ye, sir host, that been to me so dere, 295  
I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.  
And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer,  
And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye."  
Anon they kiste, and riden forth hir weye.

*Here is ended the Pardoners Tale*

PRINCE ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

IN 1589 Sir Walter Raleigh visited Spenser at Kilcolman, the poet's home in Ireland. Of this visit Spenser himself writes in *Colin Clout's come home again*; it was, indeed, a visit of importance and interest not only to Spenser himself but also to the whole of English literature. For he had spoken to Raleigh of a new poem he was then writing, and had submitted the finished part of it to his judgment. Whatever that judgment may have been—and it was probably favourable—Spenser came to England almost immediately, bringing with him the first three books of the poem for publication. Early in 1590—four or five years after Shakespeare came from Stratford to London—the fragment was published with a title that antici-

## ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

pated the rest : *The Faerie Queene, disposed into twelve books, Fashioning xii Morall vertues.*" Spenser's general plan of the poem can best be summarised in his own words in the dedicatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh that was printed at the end of the 1590 volume. "The beginning therefore of my history . . . should be the twelfth booke, which is the laste ; where I devise that the Faerie Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii dayes ; upon which xii severall dayes the occasions of the xii severall adventures hapned which, being undertaken by twelve severall knights, are in these xii books severally handled and discoursed." Like Chaucer before him he was unable to complete his mighty scheme ; the poem ends suddenly at the beginning of the eighth canto of Book vii, which is marked naïvely enough "Unperfite." It is a great allegory of the struggle between vice and virtue. There are dragons to be fought, strange monsters, fearsome giants, wily deceivers—the personification of all the sins that beset men. Against all these "the xii severall knights" are to ride out—the knights of a kind of symbolic Arthur who represents "magnificence in particular" ; and they are all subject to Gloriana, the Faerie Queene, who is an etherealised Elizabeth. The first book, from which the passage printed here is taken, describes the adventures of "the knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I expresse Holynes." He has gone out to succour the fair princess Una, whose parents, "an ancient King and Queene, had bene by a huge dragon many years shut up in a brasen Castle, who thence suffered them not to yssew." Unfortunately the Redcrosse knight

himself falls victim to the wiles of a false maid Duessa, who delivers him into the hands of a fierce and mighty giant. Una, distressed and woebegone, meets Arthur himself, and with her attendant Dwarf leads him to the castle where her fallen knight is languishing. It is at this point that the stanzas printed here take up the tale.

The allegory of the poem has long lost all its interest save its quaintness and its reminiscence of mediæval thought. It was left to a man far removed from Spenser in time and circumstance to write of the struggle of good and evil in an allegory whose characters almost lose their symbolism in their reality ; who wrote in sturdy English prose instead of sweetly modulated verse ; and had for his knights and ladies the common men and women of Bedford. But we go to Spenser for the fine spirit of poetry that marked the beginning of a new age. *The Faerie Queene* is written with a richness of poetic language that has never been surpassed, and has influenced English poetry ever since. Spenser has been called "the poet's poet." His stanza, with its slow Alexandrine and cunning rhyme, has been a mighty power in metrical form. One of Keats's earliest efforts was an imitation of Spenser, and one of his greatest, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, a poem that is permeated with the magic of the master. When Spenser died he was laid—at his own request—beside Chaucer in Westminster Abbey. From Chaucer he had had a great heritage which he passed on, ennobled and enriched, to those who followed him.

Ay me, how many perils doe enfold  
 The righteous man, to make him daily fall ?  
 Were not, that heavenly grace doth him uphold,  
 And stedfast truth acquite him out of all.  
 Her love is firme, her care continual,      5  
 So oft as he through his owne foolish pride,  
 Or weaknesse is to sinfull bands made thrall :  
 Else should this *Redcrosse* knight in bands have  
 dyde,  
 For whose deliverance she this Prince doth thither  
 guide.

They sadly traveild thus, untill they came      10  
 Nigh to a castle builded strong and hie :  
 Then cryde the Dwarfe, lo yonder is the same,  
 In which my Lord my liege doth lucklesse lie,  
 Thrall to that Gyants hatefull tyrannie :  
 Therefore, deare Sir, your mightie powres  
 assay.      15

The noble knight alighted by and by  
 From loftie steede, and bad the Ladie stay,  
 To see what end of sight should him besall that  
 day.

So with the Squire, th'admirer of his might,  
 He marched forth towards that castle wall ; 20  
 Whose gates he found fast shut, ne living wight  
 To ward the same, nor answere commers call.

Then tooke that Squire an horne of bugle<sup>1</sup> small,  
 Which hong adowne his side in twisted gold,  
 And tassels gay. Wyde wonders over all 25  
 Of that same hornes great vertues weren told,  
 Which had approved bene in uses manifold.

Was never wight, that heard that shrilling sound,  
 But trembling feare did feele in every vaine ;  
 Three miles it might be easie heard around, 30  
 And Ecchoes three answerd it selfe againe :  
 No false enchauntment, nor deceiptfull traine  
 Might once abide the terror of that blast,  
 But presently was voide and wholly vaine :  
 No gate so strong, no locke so firme and fast,  
 But with that piercing noise flew open quite, or  
 brast. 36

The same before the Geants gate he blew,  
 That all the castle quaked from the ground,  
 And every dore of freewill open flew.  
 The Gyant selfe dismayed with that sownd, 40  
 Where he with his *Duessa* dalliance fownd,  
 In hast came rushing forth from inner bowre.  
 With staring countenance sterne, as one  
 astownd,  
 And staggering steps, to weet, what suddein  
 stowre<sup>2</sup> Had wrought that horror strange, and dar'd his  
 dreaded powre. 45

<sup>1</sup> bugle : young ox.

<sup>2</sup> stowre : uproar.

## ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

And after him the proud *Duessa* came,  
High mounted on her manyheaded beast,  
And every head with fyrie tongue did flame,  
And every head was crowned on his creast,  
And bloudie mouthed with late cruell feast. 50  
That when the knight beheld, his mightie shild  
Upon his manly arme he soone addrest,  
And at him fiercely flew, with courage fild,  
And eger greedinesse through every member  
thrild.

Therewith the Gyant buckled him to fight, 55  
Inflam'd with scornefull wrath and high  
disdaine,  
And lifting up his dreadfull club on hight,  
All arm'd with ragged snubbes<sup>1</sup> and knottie  
graine,  
Him thought at first encounter to have slaine.  
But wise and warie was that noble Pere, 60  
And lightly leaping from so monstrous maine,  
Did faire avoid the violence him nere ;  
It booted nought, to thinke, such thunderbolts  
to beare.

Ne shame he thought to shunne so hideous  
might :  
The idle stroke, enforcing furious way, 65  
Missing the marke of his misaymed sight

<sup>1</sup> *snubbes* : knobs.

EDMUND SPENSER, c. 1552-1599

Did fall to ground, and with his heavie sway  
So deepeley dinted in the driven clay,  
That three yardes deepe a furrow up did throw :  
The sad earth wounded with so sore assay, 70  
Did grone full grievous underneath the blow,  
And trembling with strange feare, did like an  
earthquake show.

As when almighty *Jove* in wrathfull mood,  
To wreake the guilt of mortall sins is bent,  
Hurles forth his thundring dart with deadly  
food,<sup>1</sup> 75  
Enrold in flames, and smouldring dreriment,  
Through riven cloudes and molten firmament ;  
The fierce threeforked engin making way,  
Both loftie towres and highest trees hath rent,  
And all that might his angrie passage stay, 80  
And shooting in the earth, casts up a mount of  
clay.

His boystrous club, so buried in the ground,  
He could not rearen up againe so light,  
But that the knight him at avantage found,  
And whiles he strove his combred clubbe to  
quight<sup>2</sup> 85  
Out of the earth, with blade all burning bright  
He smote off his left arme, which like a blocke  
Did fall to ground, depriv'd of native might ;

<sup>1</sup> *food* : i.e. feud.

<sup>2</sup> *quight* : set free.

ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

Large stremes of bloud out of the truncked  
stocke

Forth gushed, like fresh water stremme from  
riven rocke. 90

Dismaied with so desperate deadly wound,  
And eke impatient of unwonted paine,  
He loudly brayd with beastly yelling sound,  
That all the fields rebellowed againe ;  
As great a noyse, as when in Cymbrian plaine  
An heard of Bulles, whom kindly rage<sup>1</sup> doth  
sting, 96

Do for the milkie mothers want complaine,  
And fill the fields with troublous bellowing,  
The neighbour woods around with hollow murmur  
ring.

That when his deare *Duessa* heard, and saw 100  
The evill stownd,<sup>2</sup> that daungerd her estate,  
Unto his aide she hastily did draw  
Her dreadfull beast, who swolne with bloud  
of late  
Came ramping forth with proud presumpteous  
gate,  
And threatned all his heads like flaming brands.  
But him the Squire made quickly to retrace, 106  
Encountring fierce with single sword in hand,  
And twixt him and his Lord did like a bulwarke  
stand.

<sup>1</sup> *kindly rage* : natural fierceness. <sup>2</sup> *stownd* : momont.

EDMUND SPENSER, c. 1552-1599

The proud *Duessa* full of wrathfull spight,  
And fierce disdaine, to be affronted<sup>1</sup> so, 110  
Enforst her purple beast with all her might  
That stop out of the way to overthroe,  
Scorning the let<sup>2</sup> of so unequall foe :  
But nathemore would that courageous swayne  
To her yeeld passage, against his Lord to goe, 115  
But with outrageous strokes did him restraine,  
And with his bodie bard the way atwixt them  
twaine.

Then tooke the angrie witch her golden cup,  
Which still she bore, replete with magick artes ;  
Death and despeyre did many thereof sup, 120  
And secret poyson through their inner parts,  
Th' eternall bale<sup>3</sup> of heavie wounded harts ;  
Which after charmes and some enchauntments  
said,  
She lightly sprinkled on his weaker parts ;  
Therewith his sturdie courage soone was  
quayd,<sup>4</sup> 125  
And all his senses were with suddeine dread  
dismayd.

So downe he fell before the cruell beast,  
Who on his necke his bloudie clawes did seize,  
That life nigh crusht out of his panting brest :

<sup>1</sup> *affronted* : encountered face to face.

<sup>2</sup> *let* : hindrance. <sup>3</sup> *bale* : misery. <sup>4</sup> *quayd* : quelled.

ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

No powre he had to stirre, nor will to rize. 130  
That when the carefull knight gan well avise,  
He lightly left the foe, with whom he fought,  
And to the beast gan turne his enterprise ;

For wondrous anguish in his hart it wrought,  
To see his loved Squire into such thraldome  
brought. 135

And high advaunceing his bloud-thirstie blade,  
Stroke one of those deformed heads so sore,  
That of his puissance proud ensample made ;  
His monstrous scalpe downe to his teeth it tore,  
And that misformed shape mis-shaped more :  
A sea of bloud gusht from the gaping wound,  
That her gay garments staynd with filthy gore,  
And overflowed all the field around ; 143  
That over shoes in bloud he waded on the ground.

Thereat he roared for exceeding paine, 145  
That to have heard, great horror would have  
bred,  
And scourging th'emptie ayre with his long  
traine,  
Through great impatience of his grieved hed  
His gorgeous ryder from her loftie sted  
Would have cast downe, and trod in durtie  
myre, . 150  
Had not the Gyant soone her succoured ;  
Who all enrag'd with smart and frantick yre,

EDMUND SPENSER, c. 1552-1599

Came hurtling in full fierce, and forst the knight  
retyre.

The force, which wont in two to be disperst,  
In one alone left hand he now unites, 155  
Which is through rage more strong then both  
were erst ;

With which his hideous club aloft he dites,<sup>1</sup>  
And at his foe with furious rigour smites,  
That strongest Oake might seeme to over-  
throw :

The stroke upon his shield so heavie lites, 160  
That to the ground it doubleth him full low :  
What mortall wight could ever beare so mon-  
strous blow ?

And in his fall his shield, that covered was,  
Did loose his vele<sup>2</sup> by chaunce, and open flew :  
The light whereof, that heavens light did pas,<sup>3</sup>  
Such blazing brightnesse through the aier  
threw, 165

That eye mote not the same endure to vew.  
Which when the Gyaunt spyde with staring  
eye,

He downe let fall his arme, and soft withdrew  
His weapon huge that heaved was on hye 170  
For to have slaine the man, that on the ground  
did lye.

<sup>1</sup> *dites* : raise to strike.

<sup>2</sup> *vele* : covering.

<sup>3</sup> *pas* : surpass.

## ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

And eke the fruitfull-headed<sup>1</sup> beast, amaz'd  
At flashing beames of that sunshiny shield,  
Became starke blind, and all his senses daz'd.  
That downe he tumbled on the durtie field, 175  
And seem'd himselfe as conquered to yield.  
Whom when his maistresse proud perceiv'd  
to fall,

Whiles yet his feeble feet for faintnesse reeld,  
Unto the Gyant loudly she gan call,  
O helpe *Orgoglio*, helpe, or else we perish all. 180

At her so pitteous cry was much amoov'd  
Her champion stout, and for to ayde his frend,  
Againe his wonted angry weapon proov'd :  
But all in vaine : for he has read his end  
In that bright shield, and all their forces spend  
Themselves in vaine : for since that glauncing  
sight, 186

He hath no powre to hurt, nor to defend ;  
As where th'Almightyes lightning brond does  
light,  
It dimmes the dazed eyen, and daunts the senses  
quight.

Whom when the Prince, to battell new addrest,  
And threatning high his dreadfull stroke did  
see, 191  
His sparkling blade about his head he blest,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *fruitfull-headed* : many-headed.

<sup>2</sup> *blest* : brandished.

EDMUND SPENSER, c. 1552-1599

And smote off quite his right leg by the knee,  
That downe he tumbled ; as an aged tree,  
High growing on the top of rocky clift, 195  
Whose hartstrings with keene steele nigh  
hewen be,  
The mightie trunk halfe rent, with ragged  
rift  
Doth roll adowne the rocks, and fall with fearefull  
drift.

Or as a Castle reared high and round,  
By subtile engins and malitious slight<sup>1</sup> 200  
Is undermined from the lowest ground,  
And her foundation forst, and feebled quight,  
At last downe falles, and with her heaped  
hight  
Her hastie ruine does more heavie make,  
And yields it selfe unto the victours might ; 205  
Such was this Gyaunts fall, that seem'd to  
shake  
The stedfast globe of earth, as it for feare did  
quake.

The knight then lightly leaping to the pray,  
With mortall steele him smot againe so sore,  
That headlesse his unweldy bodie lay, 210  
All wallowd in his owne fowle bloudy gore,  
Which flowed from his wounds in wondrous  
store.

<sup>1</sup> *slight* : trick.

## ARTHUR SLAYS ORGOGLIO

But soone as breath out of his breast did pas,  
That huge great body, which the Gyaunt bore,  
Was vanisht quite, and of that monstrous  
mas

215

Was nothing left, but like an emptie bladder was.

Whose grievous fall, when false *Duessa* spide,  
Her golden cup she cast unto the ground.  
And crowned mitre rudely threw aside ;  
Such percing grieve her stubborne hart did  
wound,

220

That she could not endure that dolefull stound,  
But leaving all behind her, fled away :  
The light-foot Squire her quickly turnd  
around,  
And by hard meanes enforcing her to stay,  
So brought unto his Lord, as his deserved pray.

From *The Faerie Queene*

## THE FALL OF EVE

MILTON has told us in a famous passage how, feeling within him a call to the great office of the poet, he resolved to write such a poem as the world would not willingly let die. A fine consciousness of the poet's vocation and dignity inspired all his work. He wrote poetry as the serious business of life ; if he laid it aside, he laid it aside deliberately, to become

## JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674

Latin Secretary to Cromwell, and so to bear his part in those eventful years. His return to the real mission afterwards, when the great talent of his sight was made useless, was as pathetic as it was magnificent. It is well always to remember that a blind man wrote *Paradise Lost*; but a man whose eyes, closed to the pageantry of earth, were open to the infinite spaces and fierce light of heaven.

*"He pass'd the flaming bounds of Place and Time :  
The living Throne, the sapphire blaze  
Where Angels tremble while they gaze,  
He saw."*

If sometimes the epic falls suddenly to earth in ludicrous bathos; if even the whole scheme of it is based (as some critics have said) upon the English Civil War and Commonwealth; if Milton's Satan is Charles I and his God Oliver Cromwell; still *Paradise Lost* remains a vast conception of time and space expressed in the mightiest poetry of which our language is capable. The two great Puritans, Milton and Bunyan, wrote each in his own way a masterpiece that defies the bounds of earth and storms the very gate of heaven.

The passage printed here has no hint of the cosmography of the poem—its physical conception of earth and heaven and hell. It is the simple story of the temptation of the woman by the serpent, but a story enriched with the narrative, argument, and description of a master in all three. Milton's chief characteristics are all well defined in the passage: the verse "para-

## THE FALL OF EVE

graph " with its sweep of narrative ; the Latinised constructions adding a strange dignity and climax to the blank verse ; the subtle control of rhythm —above all the variation of the caesura ; the triumph of what may be called " spontaneous artifice " ; the lofty imagery of thought and language.

" Resplendent Eve " stands pathetically, nobly matched with the serpent—

*" Lovely, never since of serpent kind Lovelier,"*

who sets his guile against her simple innocence. The eternal fight of good and evil is fought, in Milton's poem as in the Bible story, on the great arena of heaven and earth :

*" So saying, her rash hand in evil hour  
Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluck'd and eat :  
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat  
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe,  
That all was lost."*

There are few finer examples than that of what has since been known as the " pathetic fallacy " ; and certainly few passages of sadder and more tragic climax.



Thus saying, from her husband's hand her hand  
Soft she withdrew, and, like a wood-nymph light,  
Oread or Dryad, or of Delia's train,  
Betook her to the groves, but Delia's self  
In gait surpassed and goddess-like deport,      5  
Though not as she with bow and quiver armed,  
But with such gardening tools as Art, yet rude,

JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674

Guiltless of fire had formed, or Angels brought.  
To Pales, or Pomona, thus adorned,  
Likkest she seemed—Pomona when she fled      10  
Vertumnus—or to Ceres in her prime,  
Yet virgin of Proserpina from Jove.  
Her long with ardent look his eye pursued  
Delighted, but desiring more her stay.  
Oft he to her his charge of quick return      15  
Repeated ; she to him as oft engaged  
To be returned by noon amid the bower,  
And all things in best order to invite  
Noontide repast, or afternoon's repose.  
O much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve,      20  
Of thy presumed return ! event perverse !  
Thou never from that hour in Paradise  
Found'st either sweet repast or sound repose ;  
Such ambush, hid among sweet flowers and  
shades,

Waited, with hellish rancour imminent,      25  
To intercept thy way, or send thee back  
Despoiled of innocence, of faith, of bliss.  
For now, and since first break of dawn, the Fiend,  
Mere serpent in appearance, forth was come,  
And on his quest where likeliest he might find      30  
The only two of mankind, but in them  
The whole included race, his purposed prey.  
In bower and field he sought, where any tuft  
Of grove or garden-plot more pleasant lay,  
Their tendance or plantation for delight ;      35

## THE FALL OF EVE

By fountain or by shady rivulet  
He sought them both, but wished his hap might  
find

Eve separate ; he wished, but not with hope  
Of what so seldom chanced, when to his wish,  
Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies, 40  
Veiled in a cloud of fragrance, where she stood,  
Half-spied, so thick the roses bushing round  
About her glowed, oft stooping to support  
Each flower of slender stalk, whose head, though  
gay

Carnation, purple, azure, or specked with gold, 45  
Hung drooping unsustained. Them she upstays  
Gently with myrtle band, mindless the while  
Herself, though fairest unsupported flower,  
From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh.  
Nearer he drew, and many a walk traversed 50  
Of stateliest covert, cedar, pine, or palm ;  
Then voluble and bold, now hid, now seen  
Among thick-woven arborets and flowers  
Imbordered on each bank, the hand of Eve :  
Spot more delicious than those gardens feigned 55  
Or of revived Adonis, or renowned  
Alcinous, host of old Laertes' son,  
Or that, not mystic, where the sapient king  
Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian spouse.  
Much he the place admired, the person more. 60  
As one who, long in populous city pent,  
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,

Forth issuing on a sumner's morn, to breathe  
 Among the pleasant villages and farms  
 Adjoined, from each thing met conceives  
 delight,

65

The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,  
 Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound ;  
 If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,  
 What pleasing seemed, for her now pleases more,  
 She most, and in her look sums all delight : 70  
 Such pleasure took the Serpent to behold  
 This flowery plat, the sweet recess of Eve  
 Thus early, thus alone ; her heavenly form  
 Angelic, but more soft and feminine,  
 Her graceful innocence, her every air 75  
 Of gesture or least action, overawed  
 His malice, and with rapine sweet bereaved  
 His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought.  
 That space the Evil One abstracted stood  
 From his own evil, and for the time remained 80  
 Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed,  
 Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge.  
 But the hot hell that always in him burns,  
 Though in mid Heaven, soon ended his delight,  
 And tortures him now more, the more he sees 85  
 Of pleasure not for him ordained : then soon  
 Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts  
 Of mischief, gratulating, thus excites :—

"Thoughts, whither have ye led me ? with  
 what sweet

## THE FALL OF EVE

Compulsion thus transported to forget                    90  
 What hither brought us ? hate, not love, nor hope  
 Of Paradise for Hell, hope here to taste  
 Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,  
 Save what is in destroying ; other joy  
 To me is lost. Then let me not let pass                95  
 Occasion which now smiles : behold alone  
 The Woman, opportune to all attempts ;  
 Her husband, for I view far round, not nigh,  
 Whose higher intellectual more I shun,  
 And strength, of courage haughty, and of limb  
 Heroic built, though of terrestrial mould ;        101  
 Foe not formidable, exempt from wound,  
 I not ; so much hath Hell debased, and pain  
 Enfeebled me, to what I was in Heaven.  
 She fair, divinely fair, fit love for gods,            105  
 Not terrible, though terror be in love,  
 And beauty, not approached by stronger hate,  
 Hate stronger under show of love well feigned,  
 The way which to her ruin now I tend."

So spake the Enemy of Mankind, enclosed 110  
 In serpent, inmate bad, and toward Eve  
 Addressed his way : not with indented wave,  
 Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear,  
 Circular base of rising folds, that towered  
 Fold above fold, a surging maze ; his head    115  
 Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes ;  
 With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect  
 Amidst his circling spires, that on the grass

Floated redundant. Pleasing was his shape  
 And lovely ; never since of serpent kind      120  
 Lovelier—not those that in Illyria changed  
 Hermione and Cadmus, or the god  
 In Epidaurus ; nor to which transformed  
 Ammonian Jove, or Capitoline, was seen,  
 He with Olympias, this with her who bore      125  
 Scipio, the height of Rome. With tract oblique  
 At first, as one who sought access but feared  
 To interrupt, sidelong he works his way.  
 As when a ship, by skilful steersman wrought  
 Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind  
 Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail,      131  
 So varied he, and of his tortuous train  
 Curled many a wanton wreath in sight of Eve,  
 To lure her eye ; she, busied, heard the sound  
 Of rustling leaves, but minded not, as used      135  
 To such disport before her through the field  
 From every beast, more duteous at her call  
 Than at Circean call the herd disguised.  
 He, bolder now, uncalled before her stood,  
 But as in gaze admiring. Oft he bowed      140  
 His turret crest and sleek enamelled neck,  
 Fawning, and licked the ground whereon she trod.  
 His gentle dumb expression turned at length  
 The eye of Eve to mark his play ; he, glad  
 Of her attention gained, with serpent-tongue      145  
 Organic, or impulse of vocal air,  
 His fraudulent temptation thus began :—

## THE FALL OF EVE

“ Wonder not, sovran mistress (if perhaps  
Thou canst who art sole wonder), much less arm  
Thy looks, the heaven of mildness, with disdain,  
Displeased that I approach thee thus, and gaze  
Insatiate, I thus single, nor have feared 152  
Thy awful brow, more awful thus retired.  
Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair,  
Thee all things living gaze on, all things thine 155  
By gift, and thy celestial beauty adore,  
With ravishment beheld—there best beheld  
Where universally admired. But here,  
In this enclosure wild, these beasts among,  
Beholders rude, and shallow to discern 160  
Half what in thee is fair, one man except,  
Who sees thee (and what is one ?) who shouldst  
be seen  
A Goddess among Gods, adored and served  
By Angels numberless, thy daily train ? ”

So glozed the Tempter, and his proem tuned.  
Into the heart of Eve his words made way, 166  
Though at the voice much marvelling ; at length,  
Not unamazed, she thus in answer spake :—

“ What may this mean ? Language of Man  
pronounced  
By tongue of brute, and human sense expressed ?  
The first at least of these I thought denied 171  
To beasts, whom God on their creation-day  
Created mute to all articulate sound ;  
The latter I demur, for in their looks

Much reason, and in their actions, oft appears.  
 Thee, Serpent, subtlest beast of all the field 176  
 I knew, but not with human voice endued ;  
 Redouble, then, this miracle, and say,  
 How cam'st thou speakable of mute, and how  
 To me so friendly grown above the rest 180  
 Of brutal kind that daily are in sight :  
 Say, for such wonder claims attention due."

To whom the guileful Tempter thus replied :—  
 " Empress of this fair World, resplendent Eve !  
 Easy to me it is to tell thee all 185  
 What thou command'st, and right thou shouldst  
 be obeyed.

I was at first as other beasts that graze  
 The trodden herb, of abject thoughts and low.  
 As was my food, nor aught but food discerned  
 Or sex, and apprehended nothing high : 190  
 Till on a day, roving the field, I chanced  
 A goodly tree far distant to behold,  
 Loaden with fruit of fairest colours mixed,  
 Ruddy and gold : I nearer drew to gaze ;  
 When from the boughs a savoury odour blown,  
 Grateful to appetite, more pleased my sense 196  
 Than smell of sweetest fennel, or the teats  
 Of ewe or goat dropping with milk at even,  
 Unsucked of lamb or kid, that tend their play.  
 To satisfy the sharp desire I had 200  
 Of tasting those fair apples, I resolved  
 Not to defer ; hunger and thirst at once

## THE FALL OF EVE

Powerful persuaders, quickened at the scent  
Of that alluring fruit, urged me so keen.  
About the mossy trunk I wound me soon ;    205  
For, high from ground, the branches would  
    require

Thy utmost reach, or Adam's : round the tree  
All other beasts that saw, with like desire  
Longing and envying stood, but could not reach.  
Amid the tree now got, where plenty hung    210  
Tempting so nigh, to pluck and eat my fill  
I spared not ; for such pleasure till that hour  
At feed or fountain never had I found.  
Sated at length, ere long I might perceive  
Strange alteration in me, to degree    215  
Of reason in my inward powers, and speech  
Wanted not long, though to this shape retained.  
Thenceforth to speculations high or deep  
I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind  
Considered all things visible in Heaven,    220  
Or Earth, or Middle, all things fair and good.  
But all that fair and good in thy divine  
Semblance, and in thy beauty's heavenly ray,  
United I beheld—no fair to thine  
Equivalent or second ; which compelled    225  
Me thus, though importune perhaps, to come  
And gaze, and worship thee of right declared  
Sovran of creatures, universal Dame ! ”

So talked the spirited sly Snake ; and Eve,  
Yet more amazed, unwary thus replied :—

"Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt  
The virtue of that fruit, in thee first proved.  
But say, where grows the tree ? from hence how  
far ?

For many are the trees of God that grow  
In Paradise, and various, yet unknown 235  
To us ; in such abundance lies our choice  
As leaves a greater store of fruit untouched,  
Still hanging incorruptible, till men  
Grow up to their provision, and more hands  
Help to disburden Nature of her birth." 240

To whom the wily Adder, blithe and glad :  
"Empress, the way is ready, and not long—  
Beyond a row of myrtles, on a flat,  
Fast by a fountain, one small thicket past  
Of blowing myrrh and balm ; if thou accept 245  
My conduct, I can bring thee thither soon."

"Lead, then," said Eve. He, leading, swiftly  
rolled  
In tangles, and made intricate seem straight,  
To mischief swift. Hope elevates, and joy  
Brightens his crest ; as when a wandering fire, 250  
Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night  
Condenses, and the cold environs round,  
Kindled through agitation to a flame  
(Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends),  
Hovering and blazing with delusive light, 255  
Misleads th' amazed night-wanderer from his way  
To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,

## THE FALL OF EVE

There swallowed up and lost, from succour far :  
So glistered the dire Snake, and into fraud  
Led Eve, our credulous mother, to the Tree 260  
Of Prohibition, root of all our woe ;  
Which when she saw, thus to her guide she  
spake :—

“Serpent, we might have spared our coming  
hither,  
Fruitless to me, though fruit be here to excess,  
The credit of whose virtue rest with thee— 265  
Wondrous, indeed, if cause of such effects !  
But of this tree we may not taste nor touch ;  
God so commanded, and left that command  
Sole daughter of his voice : the rest, we live  
Law to ourselves ; our reason is our law.” 270

To whom the Tempter guilefully replied :—  
“Indeed ! Hath God then said that of the fruit  
Of all these garden-trees ye shall not eat,  
Yet lords declared of all in earth or air ? ”

To whom thus Eve, yet sinless :—“ Of the  
fruit 275  
Of each tree in the garden we may eat ;  
But of the fruit of this fair tree, amidst  
The garden, God hath said, ‘ Ye shall not eat  
Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die.’ ”

She scarce had said, though brief, when now  
more bold 280  
The Tempter, but with show of zeal and love  
To Man, and indignation at his wrong,

JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674

New part puts on, and, as to passion moved,  
Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely, and in act  
Raised, as of some great matter to begin. 285

As when of old some orator renowned  
In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence  
Flourished, since mute, to some great cause  
addressed,

Stood in himself collected, while each part,  
Motion, each act, won audience ere the tongue  
Sometimes in height began, as no delay 291  
Of preface brooking through his zeal of right :  
So standing, moving, or to height upgrown,  
The Tempter, all impassioned, thus began :—

“ O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving Plant, 295  
Mother of science ! now I feel thy power  
Within me clear, not only to discern  
Things in their causes, but to trace the ways  
Of highest agents, deemed however wise.

Queen of this Universe ! do not believe 300  
Those rigid threats of death ; ye shall not die.  
How should ye ? by the fruit ? it gives you life  
To knowledge ; by the Threatener ? look on me,  
Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live,  
And life more perfect have attained than Fate  
Meant me, by venturing higher than my lot. 306  
Shall that be shut to Man which to the beast  
Is open ? or will God incense his ire  
For such a petty trespass, and not praise  
Rather your dauntless virtue, whom the pain 310

## THE FALL OF EVE

Of death denounced, whatever thing Death be,  
Deterred not from achieving what might lead  
To happier life, knowledge of good and evil ?  
Of good, how just ? of evil—if what is evil  
Be real, why not known, since easier shunned ?  
God, therefore, cannot hurt ye, and be just ; 316  
Not just, not God ; not feared then, nor obeyed :  
Your fear itself of death removes the fear.  
Why, then, was this forbid ? Why but to awe ?  
Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, 320  
His worshippers ? He knows that in the day  
Ye eat thereof your eyes, that seem so clear,  
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then  
Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as Gods,  
Knowing both good and evil, as they know. 325  
That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man,  
*Internal Man, is but proportion meet ;*  
I, of brute, human ; ye, of human, Gods.  
So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off  
Human, to put on Gods—death to be wished, 330  
Though threatened, which no worse than this  
can bring !  
And what are Gods, that Man may not become  
As they, participating godlike food ?  
The Gods are first, and that advantage use  
On our belief, that all from them proceeds. 335  
I question it ; for this fair Earth I see,  
Warmed by the Sun, producing every kind ;  
Them nothing. If they all things, who enclosed

JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674

Knowledge of good and evil in this tree,  
That whoso eats thereof forthwith attains 340  
Wisdom without their leave ? and wherein lies  
Th' offence, that Man should thus attain to  
know ?

What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree  
Impart against his will, if all be his ?  
Or is it envy ? and can envy dwell 345  
In heavenly breasts ? These, these and many  
more

Causes import your need of this fair fruit.  
Goddess humane, reach, then, and freely taste ! ”

He ended ; and his words, replete with guile,  
Into her heart too easy entrance won : 350  
Fixed on the fruit she gazed, which to behold  
Might tempt alone ; and in her ears the sound  
Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn'd  
With reason, to her seeming, and with truth.  
Meanwhile the hour of noon drew on, and waked  
An eager appetite, raised by the smell  
So savoury of that fruit, which with desire,  
Inclivable now grown to touch or taste,  
Solicited her longing eye ; yet first,  
Pausing a while, thus to herself she mused :— 360

“ Great are thy virtues, doubtless, best of fruits,  
Though kept from Man, and worthy to be  
admired,  
Whose taste, too long forborne, at first assay  
Gave elocution to the mute, and taught

## THE FALL OF EVE

tongue not made for speech to speak thy  
praise. 365

praise he also who forbids thy use  
ceals not from us, naming thee the Tree  
Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil ;  
bids us then to taste ; but his forbidding  
amends thee more, while it infers the good  
thee communicated, and our want ; 371  
good unknown sure is not had, or, had  
yet unknown, is as not had at all.

plain, then, what forbids he but to know,  
bids us good, forbids us to be wise ? 375

h prohibitions bind not. But, if Death  
d us with after-bands, what profits then  
inward freedom ? In the day we eat  
this fair fruit, our doom is we shall die !

w dies the Serpent ? He hath eaten, and lives,  
I knows, and speaks, and reasons, and dis-  
cerns, 381

tional till then. For us alone  
s death invented ? or to us denied  
s intellectual food, for beasts reserved ?  
beasts it seems ; yet that one beast which  
first 385

h tasted envies not, but brings with joy  
good befall'n him, author unsuspect,  
endly to Man, far from deceit or guile. 388  
at fear I, then ? rather, what know to fear  
ler this ignorance of good and evil,

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

Of God or Death, of law or penalty ?  
Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine,  
Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,  
Of virtue to make wise. What hinders, then,  
To reach, and feed at once both body and mind ? ”

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour      396  
Forth-reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she  
eat;

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat,  
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe  
That all was lost. Back to the thicket slunk 400  
The guilty Serpent, and well might, for Eve,  
Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else  
Regarded ; such delight till then, as seemed,  
In fruit she never tasted, whether true,  
Or fancied so through expectation high      405  
Of knowledge ; nor was Godhead from her  
thought.

Greedily she engorged without restraint,  
And knew not eating death.

From *Paradise Lost*

THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

“ I WENT again to the ruins,” wrote Evelyn  
on September 10th, 1666, “ for it was now  
no longer a city.” It is a little odd to turn from  
his dignified and vivid account of “ the miserable  
and calamitous spectacle,” or from Pepys’s  
50

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

animated gossip about so phenomenal a conflagration, to Dryden's verses. To Evelyn, and even to Pepys, the Fire had been a huge, overpowering tragedy ; and both of them, in the safety of their "little Zoar," spared more than a thought for the poor wretches whose very world had been burnt up in the flames. But Dryden's poem—or this part of it that records the Fire—is essentially "heroick." He is a kind of English Nero, fiddling while London burns. True, he introduces the King in the nick of time, and puts into the mouth of that merry monarch a prayer for his ruined capital. But that is all. For the rest, he is delighted and content with the gusto of his artificial language, that has so fit a theme in this chief wonder of his wonderful year. The very flames leap to his rhythms :

*"At first they warm, then scorch, and then they take;  
Now with long Necks from side to side they feed:  
At length, grown strong, their Mother-fire forsake,  
And a new Colony of Flames succeed."*

There is, indeed, a rush in the poem like the rush of the flames themselves ; its imagery has a lurid light, as of the fire.

It is suggestive that Dryden compressed so lively, if sorrowful, a chronicle into that calm, grave quatrain which we now always associate with Gray's Elegy. Though Dryden's best work was done in the couplet, this poem stands as a fine tribute to his use of the stanza form.

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

But, ah ! how unsincere are all our Joys !  
Which, sent from Heav'n, like Lightning, make  
no stay :  
Their palling Taste the Journeys Length destroys,  
Or Grief, sent post, o'retakes them on the way.

Swell'd with our late Successes on the Foe, 5  
Which *France* and *Holland* wanted power to  
cross,  
We urge an unseen Fate to lay us low,  
And feed their envious Eyes with *English* loss.

Each Element his dread Command obeys,  
Who makes or ruines with a Smile or Frown ; 10  
Who as by one he did our Nation raise,  
So now, he with another pulls us down.

Yet *London*, Empress of the Northern Clime,  
By an high Fate thou greatly didst expire :  
Great as the Worlds, which, at the death of  
time, 15  
Must fall, and rise a nobler frame by fire.

As when some dire Usurper Heav'n provides  
To scourge his Country with a lawless sway  
His birth perhaps some petty Village hides,  
And sets his Cradle out of Fortune's way. 20

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

Till fully ripe his swelling Fate breaks out,  
And hurries him to mighty Mischiefs on :  
His Prince, surpriz'd at first, no ill could doubt,  
And wants the pow'r to meet it when 'tis known.

Such was the Rise of this prodigious fire,      25  
Which in mean Buildings first obscurely bred,  
From thence did soon to open Streets aspire,  
And straight to Palaces and Temples spread.

The diligence of Trades and noiseful Gain,  
And luxury, more late, asleep were laid :      30  
All was the night's, and in her silent reign  
No sound the rest of Nature did invade.

In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,  
Those seeds of Fire their fatal Birth disclose ;  
And first, few scatt'ring sparks about were blown,  
Big with the flames that to our Ruin rose.      36

Then, in some close-pent Room it crept along,  
And, smouldring as it went, in silence fed ;  
Till th' infant Monster, with devouring strong,  
Walk'd boldly upright with exalted head.      40

Now like some rich or mighty Murderer,  
Too great for Prison, which he breaks with Gold,  
Who fresher for new Mischiefs does appear  
And dares the World to tax him with the old :

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

So scapes th' insulting Fire his narrow Jail      45  
And makes small out-lets into open air :  
There the fierce Winds his tender Force assail,  
And beat him down-ward to his first repair.

And now, no longer letted of his Prey,  
He leaps up at it with inrag'd desire :      50  
O'relooks the Neighbours with a wide survey,  
And nods at every House his threatening Fire.

The Ghosts of Traitors from the *Bridge* descend,  
With bold Fanatick Spectres to rejoice :  
About the fire into a Dance they bend,      55  
And sing their Sabbath Notes with feeble voice.

Our Guardian Angel saw them where he sate  
Above the Palace of our slumbring King ;  
He sigh'd, abandoning his charge to Fate,  
And, drooping, oft lookt back upon the wing. 60

At length the crackling noise and dreadful blaze  
Call'd up some waking Lover to the sight ;  
And long it was ere he the rest could raise,  
Whose heavy Eye-lids yet were full of Night.

The next to Danger, hot persu'd by Fate,      65  
Half-cloth'd, half-naked, hastily retire :  
And frighted Mothers strike their Breasts, too  
late,  
For helpless Infants left amidst the Fire.

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

Their Cries soon waken all the Dwellers near ;  
Now murmuring Noises rise in every Street ; 70  
The more remote run stumbling with their fear,  
And, in the dark, Men jostle as they meet.

So weary Bees in little Cells repose ;  
But if Night-robbers lift the well-stor'd Hive,  
An humming through their waxen City grows, 75  
And out upon each others wings they drive.

Now Streets grow throng'd and busie as by day :  
Some run for Buckets to the hallow'd Quire :  
Some cut the Pipes, and some the Engines play ;  
And some more bold mount Ladders to the fire

In vain : For from the East a *Belgian* wind 81  
His hostile Breath through the dry Rafters sent ;  
The Flames impell'd soon left their Foes behind  
And forward, with a wanton fury went.

A Key<sup>1</sup> of Fire ran all along the Shore, 85  
And lighten'd all the River with a blaze :  
The waken'd Tides began again to roar,  
And wond'ring Fish in shining waters gaze.

Old Father Thames rais'd up his reverend head,  
But fear'd the fate of *Simois* would return : 90  
Deep in his *Ooze* he sought his sedgy Bed,  
And shrunk his Waters back into his Urn.

<sup>1</sup> i.e. quay.

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

The Fire, mean time walks in a broader gross ;  
To either hand his Wings he opens wide :  
He wades the Streets, and streight he reaches  
cross, 95  
And plays his longing Flames on th' other side.

At first they warm, then scorch, and then they  
take ;  
Now with long Necks from side to side they feed :  
At length, grown strong, their Mother-fire forsake,  
And a new Colony of Flames succeed. 100

To every nobler Portion of the Town  
The curling Billows roll their restless Tide :  
In parties now they straggle up and down,  
As Armies, unoppos'd, for Prey divide.

One mighty Squadron with a Side-wind sped, 105  
Through narrow Lanes his cumber'd Fire does  
haste :  
By pow'rful charms of Gold and Silver led,  
The *Lombard* Banquers and the *Change* to waste.

Another backward to the *Tow'r* would go,  
And slowly eats his way against the Wind : 110  
But the main body of the marching Foe  
Against th' Imperial Palace is design'd.

Now Day appears, and with the day the King,  
Whose early Care had robb'd him of his rest :

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

Far off the Cracks of Falling houses ring,      115  
And Shrieks of Subjects pierce his tender Breast.

Near as he draws, thick harbingers of Smoke  
With gloomy Pillars cover all the place :  
Whose little intervals of Night are broke  
By Sparks, that drive against his Sacred Face.

More than his Guards his Sorrows made him  
known,    121  
And pious Tears, which down his Cheeks did  
show'r :  
The Wretched in his Grief forgot their own ;  
(So much the Pity of a King has pow'r.)

He wept the Flames of what he lov'd so well,  
And what so well had merited his love :      126  
For never Prince in Grace did more excel,  
Or Royal City more in Duty strove.

Nor with an idle Care did he behold :  
(Subjects may grieve, but Monarchs must  
redress;)    130  
He chears the Fearful and commends the Bold,  
And makes Despairers hope for good Success.

Himself directs what first is to be done,  
And orders all the Succours which they bring :  
The Helpful and the Good about him run,      135  
And form an Army worthy such a King.

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

He sees the dire Contagion spread so fast  
That where it seizes, all Relief is vain :  
And therefore must unwillingly lay waste  
That Country, which would, else, the Foe main-  
tain.

140

The Powder blows up all before the Fire :  
Th' amazed flames stand gather'd on a heap ;  
And from the precipices-brink retire,  
Afraid to venture on so large a leap.

Thus fighting Fires a while themselves consume,  
But streight like *Turks*, forc'd on to win or die,  
They first lay tender Bridges of their fume,  
And o're the Breach in unctuous vapours slie.

Part stays for Passage, 'till a gust of wind  
Ships o're their Forces in a shining Sheet : 150  
Part, creeping under ground, their Journey blind,  
And, climbing from below, their Fellows meet.

Thus to some desert Plain, or old Wood-side,  
Dire Night-hags come from far to dance their  
round :  
And o're broad rivers, on their Fiends, they ride,  
Or sweep in Clouds above the blasted ground. 156

No help avails : for, *Hydra*-like, the Fire  
Lifts up his Hundred heads to aim his way :  
And scarce the wealthy can one half retire,  
Before he rushes in to share the Prey. 160

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

The Rich grow suppliant, and the Poor grow proud :  
Those offer mighty gain, and these ask more ;  
So void of pity is th' ignoble Crowd,  
When others Ruin may increase their Store.

As those who live by Shores with joy behold 165  
Some wealthy Vessel split or stranded nigh ;  
And from the Rocks leap down for ship-wrack'd  
Gold,

And seek the Tempest which the others flee :

So these but wait the Owners last despair,  
And what's permitted to the flames invade : 170  
Ev'n from their Jaws they hungry morsels tear,  
And, on their backs, the Spoils of *Vulcan* lade.

The days were all in this lost labour spent ;  
And when the weary King gave place to Night,  
His Beams he to his Royal Brother lent, 175  
And so shone still in his reflective Light.

Night came, but without darkness or repose,  
A dismal Picture of the gen'ral Doom ;  
Where Souls distracted when the Trumpet blows,  
And half unready with their Bodies come. 180

Those who have Homes, when Home they do  
repair,  
To a last Lodging call their wand'ring Friends :  
Their short uneasy Sleeps are broke with Care,  
To look how near their own Destruction tends.

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

Those who have none, sit round where once it  
was, 185

And with full Eyes each wonted Room require :  
Haunting the yet warm Ashes of the place,  
As murder'd Men walk where they did expire.

Some stir up Coals, and watch the Vestal fire,  
Others in vain from sight of Ruin run ; 190  
And, while through burning Lab'rinths they  
retire,  
With loathing Eyes repeat what they would shun.

The most in Fields like herded Beasts lie down,  
To Dews obnoxious on the grassie Floor ;  
And while their Babes in Sleep their Sorrows  
drown, 195  
Sad Parents watch the remnants of their Store.

No thought can ease them but their Sovereign's  
Care,  
Whose Praise th' afflicted as their Comfort sing ;  
Ev'n those, whom Want might drive to just  
despair,  
Think Life a Blessing under such a King. 200

Mean time he sadly suffers in their Grief,  
Out-weeps an Hermite, and out-prays a Saint ;  
All the long night he studies their relief,  
How they may be suppli'd, and he may want.

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

"O God," said he, "Thou Patron of my Days, 205  
Guide of my Youth in Exile and Distress !  
Who me unfriended brought'st by wondrous ways,  
The Kingdom of my Fathers to possess :

Be Thou my Judge, with what unwearied Care  
I since have labour'd for my People's good ; 210  
To bind the Bruises of a Civil War,  
And stop the Issues of their wasting Blood.

Thou, who hast taught me to forgive the Ill,  
And recompense, as Friends, the Good misled :  
If Mercy be a Precept of Thy Will, 215  
Return that Mercy on Thy Servants head.

Or, if my heedless Youth has stept astray,  
Too soon forgetful of Thy gracious hand ;  
On me alone Thy just Displeasure lay,  
But take Thy Judgments from this mourning  
Land. 220

We all have sinn'd, and Thou hast laid us low,  
As humble Earth from whence at first we came :  
Like flying Shades before the Clouds we shew,  
And shrink like Parchment in consuming Flame.

O let it be enough what Thou hast done ; 225  
When spotted Deaths ran arm'd thro' every Street,  
With poison'd Darts which not the Good could shun,  
The Speedy could out-slie, or Valiant meet.

JOHN DRYDEN, 1631-1700

The living few, and frequent Funerals then,  
Proclaim'd Thy Wrath on this forsaken place :  
And now those few, who are return'd agen, 231  
They searching Judgments to their dwellings trace.

O pass not, Lord, an absolute Decree,  
Or bind Thy Sentence unconditional ;  
But in Thy Sentence our Remorse foresee, 235  
And, in that foresight, this Thy Doom recall.

Thy Threatings, Lord, as Thine Thou maist  
revoke :  
But, if immutable and fix'd they stand,  
Continue still Thy self to give the stroke,  
And let not Foreign-foes oppress Thy Land." 240

Th' Eternal heard, and from the Heav'nly Quire  
Chose out the Cherub with the flaming Sword :  
And bad him swiftly drive th' approaching Fire  
From where our Naval Magazins were stor'd.

The blessed Minister his Wings displai'd, 245  
And like a shooting Star he cleft the night ;  
He charg'd the Flames, and those that disobey'd  
He lash'd to duty with his Sword of light.

The fugitive Flames, chastis'd, went forth to prey  
On pious Structures, by our Fathers rear'd ; 250  
By which to Heav'n they did affect the way,  
Ere Faith in Church-men without Works was  
heard.

## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

The wanting Orphans saw with watry Eyes  
Their Founders Charity in Dust laid low,  
And sent to God their ever-answer'd cries, 255  
(For he protects the Poor, who made them so.)

Nor could thy Fabrick, *Paul's*, defend thee long,  
Though thou wert Sacred to thy Makers praise :  
Though made Immortal by a Poet's Song,  
And Poets Songs the *Theban* walls could raise.

The daring Flames peep't in, and saw from far  
The awful Beauties of the Sacred Quire :  
But, since it was prophan'd by Civil War,  
Heav'n thought it fit to have it purg'd by fire.

Now down the narrow Streets it swiftly came,  
And, widely opening, did on both sides prey : 266  
This benefit we sadly owe the Flame,  
If only Ruin must enlarge our way.

And now four days the Sun had seen our Woes ;  
Four nights the Moon beheld th' incessant fire ;  
It seem'd as if the Stars more sickly rose, 271  
And farther from the feav'rish North retire.

In th' Empyrean Heav'n (the Bless'd abode)  
The Thrones and the Dominions prostrate lie,  
Not daring to behold their angry God : 275  
And an hush'd silence damps the tuneful Sky.

GEORGE CRABBE, 1754-1832

At length th' Almighty cast a pitying Eye,  
And Mercy softly touch'd His melting Breast :  
He saw the Towns one half in Rubbish lie,  
And eager flames drive on to storm the rest. 280

An hollow chrystral Pyramid he takes,  
In firmamental Waters dipt above ;  
Of it a broad Extinguisher he makes  
And hoods the Flames that to their quarry strove.

The vanquish'd Fires withdraw from every place,  
Or, full with feeding, sink into a sleep : 286  
Each household Genius shows again his face,  
And, from the hearths, the little Lares creep.

Our King this more than natural change beholds ;  
With sober Joy his heart and eyes abound : 290  
To the All-good his lifted hands he folds,  
And thanks him low on his redeemed ground.

From *Annus Mirabilis*

PETER GRIMES

THE early years of Crabbe's life were spent in and about the little town of Aldeburgh on the Suffolk coast. Aldeburgh to-day is a pleasant place, with all the interest of age and history. From Dunwich, where the sea has washed the church away, it is a lone romantic

## PETER GRIMES

land that stretches southward to the little borough ; and the river Alde, running for ten miles by the coast before it ventures to tumble into the sea, gives to the place an atmosphere of rather odd isolation. But in Crabbe's time Aldeburgh, now beloved of holiday-makers, was a sordid town ; its people poor, ignorant, and rough ; its streets dirty ; its houses tumble-down and dark. Nor was the country round about, which even to-day is desolate enough when rain and the wind from the sea drive across it, any more cheerful than the town. To Crabbe, when he returned to the curacy of Aldeburgh after ill success in London, the place must have seemed the very essence of remoteness and desolation. Yet the town and the country-side and the wild coast were the inspiration of his best poems. He has become, as it were, the "laurcet" of the sordid—the marshland, the slow-moving Alde, the dark streets and their darker people. His landscapes have more of cloud than of sunshine ; they are beset by wind over waste places. But his tales are most interesting for their people. At a time when Mr. Pope's polished couplets, full of the wit, philosophy, and politics of the town, were still all-powerful, Crabbe was searching the Parish Register for his characters, and making his poetry out of their dusty record ; or going the rounds of the alleys and roads to find stark and unadorned romance. He sings, in a minor key, the little lives of such as have no memorial ; though the grimmer mood of a poem like *Peter Grimes* is even more characteristic of him than the passive contemplation of human transience

GEORGE CRABBE, 1754-1832

and sorrow. In Crabbe we see a half-developed Wordsworth ; one who saw Nature and men in their crude simplicity, yet had no interpretation of their secret. But he is, after all, one of Wordsworth's greatest forerunners ; for he wrote, almost alone in his time, on the theme of Nature and those who lived nearest to her in both her monotony and her caprice. It was in these that Wordsworth afterwards found sometimes an exultant joy and sometimes "the thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."



Old Peter Grimes made fishing his employ,  
His wife he cabin'd with him and his boy,  
And seem'd that life laborious to enjoy :  
To town came quiet Peter with his fish,  
And had of all a civil word and wish.      5  
He left his trade upon the sabbath-day,  
And took young Peter in his hand to pray :  
But soon the stubborn boy from care broke loose,  
At first refused, then added his abuse :  
His father's love he scorn'd, his power defied, 10  
But being drunk, wept sorely when he died.

Yes ! then he wept, and to his mind there came  
Much of his conduct, and he felt the shame,—  
How he had oft the good old man reviled,  
And never paid the duty of a child ;      15  
How, when the father in his Bible read,  
He in contempt and anger left the shed :  
" It is the word of life," the parent cried ;  
— " This is the life itself," the boy replied ;

## PETER GRIMES

And while old Peter in amazement stood,      20  
Gave the hot spirit to his boiling blood :—  
How he, with oath and furious speech, began  
To prove his freedom and assert the man ;  
And when the parent check'd his impious rage,  
How he had cursed the tyranny of age,—      25  
Nay, once had dealt the sacrilegious blow  
On his bare head, and laid his parent low ;  
The father groan'd—" If thou art old," said he,  
" And hast a son—thou wilt remember me :  
Thy mother left me in a happy time,      30  
Thou kill'dst not her—Heav'n spares the double  
crime."

On an inn-settle, in his maudlin grief,  
This he revolved, and drank for his relief.

Now lived the youth in freedom, but debarr'd  
From constant pleasure, and he thought it hard ;  
Hard that he could not every wish obey,      36  
But must awhile relinquish ale and play ;  
Hard ! that he could not to his cards attend,  
But must acquire the money he would spend.

With greedy eye he look'd on all he saw,      40  
He knew not justice, and he laugh'd at law ;  
On all he mark'd he stretch'd his ready hand ;  
He fish'd by water, and he filch'd by land :  
Oft in the night has Peter dropp'd his oar,  
Fled from his boat and sought for prey on shore ;  
Oft up the hedge-row glided, on his back      46  
Bearing the orchard's produce in a sack,

Or farm-yard load, tugg'd fiercely from the stack ;  
 And as these wrongs to greater numbers rose,  
 The more he look'd on all men as his foes.      50

He built a mud-wall'd hovel, where he kept  
 His various wealth, and there he oft-times slept ;  
 But no success could please his cruel soul.  
 He wish'd for one to trouble and control ;  
 He wanted some obedient boy to stand      55  
 And bear the blow of his outrageous hand ;  
 And hoped to find in some propitious hour  
 A feeling creature subject to his power.

Peter had heard there were in London then,—  
 Still have they being !—workhouse-clearing men,  
 Who, undisturb'd by feelings just or kind,      61  
 Would parish-boys to needy tradesmen bind ;  
 They in their want a trifling sum would take,  
 And toiling slaves of piteous orphans make.

Such Peter sought, and when a lad was found,  
 The sum was dealt him, and the slave was  
 bound.

Some few in town observed in Peter's trap  
 A boy, with jacket blue and woollen cap ;  
 But none inquired how Peter used the rope,  
 Or what the bruise, that made the stripling stoop ;  
 None could the ridges on his back behold,      71  
 None sought him shiv'ring in the winter's cold ;  
 None put the question,—“Peter, dost thou give  
 The boy his food ?—What, man ! the lad must  
 live :

Consider, Peter, let the child have bread,      75  
 He'll serve thee better if he's stroked and fed." "  
 None reason'd thus—and some, on hearing cries,  
 Said calmly, " Grimes is at his exercise."

Pinn'd, beaten, cold, pinch'd, threaten'd, and  
 abused—

His efforts punish'd and his food refused,—      So  
 Awake tormented,—soon aroused from sleep,—  
 Struck if he wept, and yet compell'd to weep,  
 The trembling boy drop'd down and strove to  
 pray,

Received a blow, and trembling turn'd away,  
 Or sobb'd and hid his pitous face ;—while he,      85  
 The savage master, grinn'd in horrid glee :  
 He'd now the power he ever loved to show,  
 A feeling being subject to his blow.

Thus lived the lad, in hunger, peril, pain,  
 His tears despised, his supplications vain :      90  
 Compell'd by fear to lie, by need to steal,  
 His bed uneasy and unbliss'd his meal,  
 For three sad years the boy his tortures bore,  
 And then his pains and trials were no more.

" How died he, Peter ? " when the people said,  
 He growl'd—" I found him lifeless in his bed " ;  
 Then tried for softer tone, and sigh'd, " Poor  
 Sam is dead."

Yet murmurs were there, and some questions  
 ask'd,—

How he was fed, how punish'd, and how task'd ?

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Much they suspected, but they little proved, 100  
And Peter pass'd untroubled and unmoved.

Another boy with equal ease was found,  
The money granted, and the victim bound ;  
And what his fate ?—One night it chanced he fell  
From the boat's mast and perish'd in her well, 105  
Where fish were living kept, and where the boy  
(So reason'd men) could not himself destroy :—

“ Yes ! so it was,” said Peter, “ in his play,  
(For he was idle both by night and day,) 110  
He climb'd the main-mast and then fell  
below ” ;—

Then show'd his corpse and pointed to the blow :  
“ What said the jury ? ”—they were long in doubt,  
But sturdy Peter faced the matter out :  
So they dismiss'd him, saying at the time,  
“ Keep fast your hatchway when you've boys  
who climb.” 115

This hit the conscience, and he colour'd more  
Than for the closest questions put before.

Thus all his fears the verdict set aside,  
And at the slave-shop Peter still applied.

Then came a boy, of manners soft and mild,—  
Our seamen's wives with grief beheld the child ;  
All thought (the poor themselves) that he was  
one

Of gentle blood, some noble sinner's son.  
However this, he seem'd a gracious lad,  
In grief submissive and with patience sad. 125

## PETER GRIMES

Passive he labour'd, till his slender frame  
Bent with his loads, and he at length was lame :  
Strange that a frame so weak could bear so long  
The grossest insult and the foulest wrong ;  
But there were causes—in the town they gave  
Fire, food, and comfort to the gentle slave ; 131  
And though stern Peter, with a cruel hand,  
And knotted rope, enforced the rude command,  
Yet he consider'd what he'd lately felt,  
And his vile blows with selfish pity dealt. 135

One day such draughts the cruel fisher made,  
He could not vend them in his borough-trade,  
But sail'd for London-mart : the boy was ill,  
But ever humbled to his master's will ;  
And on the river, where they smoothly sail'd, 140  
He strove with terror and awhile prevail'd ;  
But new to danger on the angry sea,  
He clung affrighten'd to his master's knee :  
The boat grew leaky and the wind was strong,  
Rough was the passage and the time was long ;  
His liquor fail'd, and Peter's wrath arose,— 146  
No more is known—the rest we must suppose,  
Or learn of Peter ;—Peter says, he “ spied  
The stripling's danger and for harbour tried ;  
Meantime the fish, and then th' apprentice  
died.”

The pitying women raised a clamour round, 151  
And weeping said, “ Thou hast thy 'prentice  
drown'd.”

Now the stern man was summon'd to the hall  
 To tell his tale before the burghers all :  
 He gave th' account ; profess'd the lad he loved  
 And kept his brazen features all unmoved. 150

The mayor himself with tone severe replied,—  
 “ Henceforth with thee shall never boy abide ;  
 Hire thee a freeman, whom thou durst not beat  
 But who, in thy despite, will sleep and eat : 160  
 Free thou art now !—again shouldst thou appear,  
 Thou'l find thy sentence, like thy soul, severe.”

Alas ! for Peter not a helping hand,  
 So was he hated, could he now command ;  
 Alone he row'd his boat, alone he cast 165  
 His nets beside, or made his anchor fast ;  
 To hold a rope or hear a curse was none,—  
 He toil'd and rail'd ; he groan'd and swore alone.

Thus by himself compell'd to live each day,  
 To wait for certain hours the tide's delay ; 170  
 At the same times the same dull views to see,  
 The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree  
 The water only, when the tides were high,  
 When low, the mud half-cover'd and half-dry ;  
 The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks, 175  
 And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks ;  
 Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,  
 As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.

When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day  
 Through the tall bounding mud-banks made  
 their way, 180

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Which on each side rose swelling, and below  
The dark warm flood ran silently and slow ;  
There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,  
There hang his head, and view the lazy tide  
In its hot slimy channel slowly glide ;      185  
Where the small eels that left the deeper way  
For the warm shore, within the shallows play ;  
Where gaping mussels, left upon the mud,  
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood ;—  
Here dull and hopeless he'd lie down and trace 190  
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked  
race ;

Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry  
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye ;  
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,  
And the loud bittern, from the bulrush home, 195  
Gave from the salt-ditch side the bellowing boom :  
He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,  
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice ;  
Where the small stream, confined in narrow  
bound,

Ran with a dull, unvaried, sadd'ning sound ; 200  
Where all, presented to the eye or ear,  
Oppress'd the soul with misery, grief, and fear.

Besides these objects, there were places three,  
Which Peter seem'd with certain dread to see ;  
When he drew near them he would turn from  
each,      205  
And loudly whistle till he pass'd the reach.

A change of scene to him brought no relief ;  
 In town, 'twas plain, men took him for a thief :  
 The sailors' wives would stop him in the street,  
 And say, " Now, Peter, thou'st no boy to beat "  
 Infants at play, when they perceived him, ran,  
 Warning each other—" That's the wicked man ".  
 He growl'd an oath, and in an angry tone  
 Cursed the whole place and wish'd to be alone.

Alone he was, the same dull scenes in view, 215  
 And still more gloomy in his sight they grew :  
 Though man he hated, yet employ'd alone  
 At bootless labour, he would swear and groan,  
 Cursing the shoals that glided by the spot,  
 And gulls that caught them when his arts could  
 not. 220

Cold nervous tremblings shook his sturdy  
 frame.  
 And strange disease—he couldn't say the name ;  
 Wild were his dreams, and oft he rose in fright,  
 Waked by his view of horrors in the night,—  
 Horrors that would the sternest minds amaze, 225  
 Horrors that demons might be proud to raise :  
 And though he felt forsaken, grieved at heart,  
 To think he lived from all mankind apart ;  
 Yet, if a man approach'd, in terrors he would start.

A winter pass'd since Peter saw the town, 230  
 And summer-lodgers were again come down ;  
 These, idly curious, with their glasses spied  
 The ships in bay as anchor'd for the tide,—

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The river's craft,—the bustle of the quay,—  
And sea-port views, which landmen love to see. 235

One, up the river, had a man and boat  
Seen day by day, now anchor'd, now afloat ;  
Fisher he seem'd, yet used no net nor hook ;  
Of sea-fowl swimming by no heed he took,  
But on the gliding waves still fix'd his lazy look :  
At certain stations he would view the stream, 241  
As if he stood bewilder'd in a dream,  
Or that some power had chain'd him for a time,  
To feel a curse or meditate on crime.

This known, some curious, some in pity went,  
And others question'd—"Wretch, dost thou  
repent ?" 246

He heard, he trembled, and in fear resign'd  
His boat : new terror fill'd his restless mind ;  
Furious he grew, and up the country ran,  
And there they seized him—a distemper'd  
man :— 250

Him we received, and to a parish-bed,  
Follow'd and curs'd, the groaning man was led.

Here when they saw him, whom they used to  
shun,  
A lost, lone man, so harass'd and undone ;  
Our gentle females, ever prompt to feel, 255  
Perceived compassion on their anger steal ;  
His crimes they could not from their memories  
blot,  
But they were grieved, and trembled at his lot.

A priest too came, to whom his words are told ;  
And all the signs they shudder'd to behold. 260

"Look ! look !" they cried ; "his limbs with  
horror shake,

And as he grinds his teeth, what noise they make !  
How glare his angry eyes, and yet he's not awake :  
See ! what cold drops upon his forehead stand,  
And how he clenches that broad bony hand." 265

The priest attending, found he spoke at times  
As one alluding to his fears and crimes :  
"It was the fall," he mutter'd, "I can show  
The manner how—I never struck a blow :"—  
And then aloud—"Unhand me, free my chain ;  
On oath, he fell—it struck him to the brain :—  
Why ask my father ?—that old man will swear  
Against my life ; besides, he wasn't there :—  
What, all agreed ?—Am I to die to-day ?—  
My Lord, in mercy, give me time to pray." 275

Then, as they watch'd him, calmer he became,  
And grew so weak he couldn't move his frame,  
But murmuring spake,—while they could see and  
hear

The start of terror and the groan of fear ;  
See the large dew-beads on his forehead rise, 280  
And the cold death-drop glaze his sunken eyes ;  
Nor yet he died, but with unwonted force  
Seem'd with some fancied being to discourse :  
He knew not us, or with accustom'd art  
He hid the knowledge, yet exposed his heart ; 285

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'Twas part confession and the rest defence,  
A madman's tale, with gleams of waking sense.

" I'll tell you all," he said, " the very day  
When the old man first placed them in my way :  
My father's spirit—he who always tried      290  
To give me trouble, when he lived and died—  
When he was gone, he could not be content  
To see my days in painful labour spent,  
But would appoint his meetings, and he made  
Me watch at these, and so neglect my trade. 295

" 'Twas one hot noon, all silent, still, serene,  
No living being had I lately seen ;  
I paddled up and down and dipp'd my net,  
But (such his pleasure) I could nothing get,—  
A father's pleasure, when his toil was done, 300  
To plague and torture thus an only son !  
And so I sat and look'd upon the stream,  
How it ran on, and felt as in a dream :  
But dream it was not ; no !—I fix'd my eyes  
On the mid stream and saw the spirits rise ; 305  
I saw my father on the water stand,  
And hold a thin pale boy in either hand ;  
And there they glided ghastly on the top  
Of the salt flood, and never touch'd a drop :  
I would have struck them, but they knew th' intent,      310  
And smiled upon the oar, and down they went.

" Now, from that day, whenever I began  
To dip my net, there stood the hard old man—

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He and those boys : I humbled me and pray'd  
They would be gone ;—they heeded not, but  
stay'd : 315

Nor could I turn, nor would the boat go by,  
But gazing on the spirits, there was I :  
They bade me leap to death, but I was loth to die :  
And every day, as sure as day arose,  
Would these three spirits meet me ere the close ;  
To hear and mark them daily was my doom, 321  
And ‘Come,’ they said, with weak, sad voices,  
‘come.’

To row away with all my strength I try'd,  
But there were they, hard by me in the tide,  
The three unbodied forms—and ‘Come,’ still  
‘come,’ they cried. 325

“ Fathers should pity—but this old man shook  
His hoary locks, and froze me by a look :  
Thrice, when I struck them, through the water came  
A hollow groan, that weaken'd all my frame :  
‘ Father ! ’ said I, ‘ have mercy ’ :—He replied,  
I know not what—the angry spirit lied, 331  
‘ Didst thou not draw thy knife ? ’ said he :—

‘ Twas true,  
But I had pity and my arm withdrew :  
He cried for mercy which I kindly gave,  
But he has no compassion in his grave. 335

“ There were three places, where they ever  
rose,—

The whole long river has not such as those,—

PETER GRIMES

Places accursed, where, if a man remain,  
He'll see the things which strike him to the brain ;  
And there they made me on my paddle lean, 340  
And look at them for hours ;—accursed scene !  
When they would glide to that smooth eddy-  
space,

Then bid me leap and join them in the place ;  
And at my groans each little villain sprite  
Enjoy'd my pains and vanish'd in delight. 345

“ In one fierce summer-day, when my poor  
brain

Was burning hot, and cruel was my pain,  
Then came this father-foe, and there he stood  
With his two boys again upon the flood ;  
There was more mischief in their eyes, more glee  
In their pale faces when they glared at me : 351  
Still did they force me on the oar to rest,  
And when they saw me fainting and oppress'd,  
He, with his hand, the old man, scoop'd the flood,  
And there came flame about him mix'd with  
blood ; 355

He bade me stoop and look upon the place,  
Then flung the hot-red liquor in my face ;  
Burning it blazed, and then I roared for pain,  
I thought the demons would have turn'd my  
brain.

“ Still there they stood, and forced me to  
behold 360

A place of horrors—they cannot be told—

Where the flood open'd, there I heard the shriek  
 Of tortured guilt—no earthly tongue can speak :  
 ‘ All days alike ! for ever ! ’ did they say,  
 ‘ And unremitting torments every day ’— 365  
 Yes, so they said ” :—But here he ceased and  
 gazed

On all around, affrighten'd and amazed ;  
 And still he tried to speak, and look'd in dread  
 Of frighten'd females gathering round his bed ;  
 Then dropp'd exhausted, and appear'd at rest,  
 Till the strong foe the vital powers possess'd : 371  
 Then with an inward, broken voice he cried,  
 “ Again they come,” and mutter'd as he died.

## TAM O' SHANTER

IT is always a little difficult for an Englishman to understand and appreciate Burns, if only by reason of the dialect. But the simple pathos of such poems as *To a Mouse* and *To a Daisy*, with their homely atmosphere of the fields where Burns worked as a ploughman, and the poignant sadness of his love songs break down all barriers of language. Burns has, indeed, the surest of all appeals through those elemental qualities of tenderness, sorrow, and humour that are the essence of all true poetry. In this poem he lets his fun run riot—the gay, rollicking laughter of “drouthy neibors,” at the wiles of the devil, when the drink has been free. It has the fresh-

## TAM O' SHANTER

ness of Shakespeare's laughter, which, Carlyle said, was like sunshine over the deep sea. The persistent regret, that reveals itself in so much of Burns's work, is half whimsical here, in the most familiar lines of the poem :

*"But pleasures are like poppies spread—  
You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed ;  
Or like the snow falls in the river—  
A moment white, then melts for ever ;  
Or like the rainbow's lovely form  
Evanishing amid the storm."*

Perhaps through the gusto of the narrator and these sad similes of the countryman we have represented in *Tam o' Shanter* the two chief characteristics of its author and his work.



When Chapman billies<sup>1</sup> leave the street,  
And drouthy<sup>2</sup> neibors neibors meet,  
As market-days are wearing late,  
An' folk begin to tak the gate<sup>3</sup> ;  
While we sit bousing at the nappy,<sup>4</sup> 5  
An' getting sou and unco happy,  
We think na on the lang Scots miles,  
The mosses, waters, slaps,<sup>5</sup> and styles,  
That lie between us and our hame,  
Where sits our sulky sullen dame, 10  
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,  
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

<sup>1</sup> Chapman billies : pedlar fellows.

<sup>2</sup> drouthy : thirsty.

<sup>4</sup> nappy : strong ale.

<sup>3</sup> gate : road.

<sup>5</sup> slaps : gaps.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,  
 As he frae Ayr ae night did canter—  
 (Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses  
 For honest men and bonnie lasses).

O Tam ! hadst thou but been sae wise  
 As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice !  
 She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,<sup>1</sup>  
 A bletherin', blusterin', drunken blellum<sup>2</sup> ;      20  
 That frae November till October,  
 Ae market-day thou was na sober ;  
 That ilka melder<sup>3</sup> wi' the miller  
 Thou sat as lang as thou had siller ;  
 That every naig was ca'd<sup>4</sup> a shoe on,      25  
 The smith and thee gat roarin' fou on ;  
 That at the Lord's house, even on Sunday,  
 Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.  
 She prophesied that, late or soon,  
 Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon<sup>5</sup> ; 30  
 Or catch'd wi' warlocks<sup>6</sup> in the mirk  
 By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames ! it gars<sup>6</sup> me greet  
 To think how mony counsels sweet,  
 How mony lengthen'd sage advices,  
 The husband frae the wife despises !      35

But to our tale : Ae market night,  
 Tam had got planted unco right,

<sup>1</sup> *skellum* : ne'er-do-well.    <sup>2</sup> *blellum* : idle chatterbox.

<sup>3</sup> *melder* : time when corn is taken to the mill to be ground.    <sup>4</sup> *ca'd* : driven.    <sup>5</sup> *warlocks* : wizards.

<sup>6</sup> *gars* : makes ; *greet* : weep.

TAM O' SHANTER

Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,  
 Wi' reaming swats,<sup>1</sup> that drank divinely ;      40  
 And at his elbow, Souter<sup>2</sup> Johnny,  
 His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony ;  
 Tam lo'ed him like a very brither ;  
 They had been fou for weeks thegither.  
 The night drove on wi' sangs and clatter,      45  
 And aye the ale was growing better :  
 The landlady and Tam grew gracious,  
 Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious :  
 The souter tauld his queerest stories ;  
 The landlord's laugh was ready chorus :      50  
 The storm without might rair and rustle,  
 Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,  
 E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy ;  
 As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,      55  
 The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure ;  
 Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
 O'er a' the ills o' life victorious !

But pleasures are like poppies spread—  
 You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed ;      60  
 Or like the snow falls in the river—  
 A moment white—then melts for ever ;  
 Or like the borealis race,  
 That flit ere you can point their place ;  
 Or like the rainbow's lovely form      65

<sup>1</sup> *reaming swats* : foaming new ale.

<sup>2</sup> *souter* : shoemaker.

Evanishing amid the storm.

Nae man can tether time or tide ;  
 The hour approaches Tam maun ride ;  
 That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane,  
 That dreary hour he mounts his beast in ;      70  
 And sic a night he taks the road in,  
 As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last ;  
 The rattling show'rs rose on the blast ;  
 The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd ;    75  
 Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd :  
 That night, a child might understand,  
 The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his grey mare, Meg,  
 A better never lifted leg,                        80  
 Tam skelpit <sup>1</sup> on thro' dub <sup>1</sup> and mire,  
 Despising wind, and rain, and fire ;  
 Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet ;  
 Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet ;  
 Whiles glow'ring round wi' prudent cares,      85  
 Lest bogles <sup>2</sup> catch him unawares :  
 Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,  
 Whare ghaists and houlets <sup>3</sup> nightly cry.  
 By this time he was cross the ford,  
 Where in the snaw the chapman smoor'd <sup>4</sup> ;      90

<sup>1</sup> *skelpit* : moves briskly on ; *dub* : puddle.

<sup>2</sup> *bogles* : hobgoblins.

<sup>3</sup> *houlets* : owls.

<sup>4</sup> *smoor'd* : smothered.

TAM O' SHANTER

And past the birks<sup>1</sup> and meikle stane,  
 Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane ;  
 And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,  
 Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn ;  
 And near the thorn, aboon the well,                  95  
 Where Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.  
 Before him Doon pours all his floods ;  
 The doubling storm roars thro' the woods ;  
 The lightnings flash from pole to pole ;  
 Near and more near the thunders roll :                  100  
 When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,  
 Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze ;  
 Thro' ilka bore<sup>2</sup> the beams were glancing ;  
 And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn !                  105

What dangers thou canst make us scorn !  
 Wi' tippenny,<sup>3</sup> we fear nae evil ;  
 Wi' usquebae,<sup>4</sup> we'll face the devil !  
 The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,  
 Fair play, he car'd na deils a boddle !<sup>5</sup>                  110  
 But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd,  
 Till, by the heel and hand admonish'd,  
 She ventur'd forward on the light ;  
 And, wow ! Tam saw an unco sight !

Warlocks and witches in a dance !                  115

Nae cotillon brent new frae France,

<sup>1</sup> *birks* : birches.

<sup>4</sup> *usquebae* : whisky.

<sup>2</sup> *ilka bore* : each hole.

<sup>5</sup> *boddle* : halfpenny.

<sup>3</sup> *tippenny* : weak ale.

ROBERT BURNS, 1759-1796

But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,  
Put life and mettle in their heels.

A winnock-bunker<sup>1</sup> in the east,

There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast—

120

A touzie tyke,<sup>2</sup> black, grim, and large !

To gie them music was his charge :

He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl,<sup>3</sup>

Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.<sup>4</sup>—

Coffins stood round like open presses,

125

That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses ;

And by some devilish cantraip sleight<sup>5</sup>

Each in its cauld hand held a light,

By which heroic Tam was able

To note upon the haly table

130

A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns<sup>6</sup> ;

Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns ;

A thief new-cutted frae a rape—

Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape ;

Five tomahawks, wi' blude red rusted ;

135

Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted ;

A garter, which a babe had strangled ;

A knife, a father's throat had mangled,

Whom his ain son o' life bereft,

The grey hairs yet stack to the lefft ;

140

Wi' mair of horrible and awefu',

Which even to name wad be unlawfu'.

<sup>1</sup> winnock-bunker : seat in the window.

<sup>2</sup> touzie tyke : rough dog.

<sup>3</sup> skirl : shriek.

<sup>4</sup> dirl : ring.

<sup>5</sup> cantraip sleight : cunning trick.

<sup>6</sup> airns : irons.

## TAM O' SHANTER

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd, and curious,  
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious :  
 The piper loud and louder blew ;                   145  
 The dancers quick and quicker flew ;  
 They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,<sup>1</sup>  
 Till ilka carlin <sup>2</sup> swat and reekit,  
 And coost her duddies <sup>3</sup> to the wark,  
 And linkit <sup>4</sup> at it in her sark <sup>4</sup> !                   150  
 Till first ae caper, syne anither,  
 Tam tint <sup>5</sup> his reason a' thegither,  
 And roars out “ Weel done, Cutty <sup>6</sup>-sark ! ”  
 And in an instant all was dark !  
 And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,               155  
 When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke <sup>7</sup>  
 When plundering herds assail their byke,<sup>8</sup>  
 As open pussie's mortal foes  
 When pop ! she starts before their nose,           160  
 As eager runs the market-crowd  
 When “ Catch the thief ! ” resounds aloud,  
 So Maggie runs—the witches follow,  
 Wi' mony an eldritch <sup>9</sup> skriech and hollo.

<sup>1</sup> cleekit : linked themselves.

<sup>2</sup> carlin : witch.

<sup>3</sup> coost her duddies : cast off her rags.

<sup>4</sup> linkit : tripped lightly about ; sark : shirt.

<sup>5</sup> tint : lost.

<sup>6</sup> Cutty : short.

<sup>7</sup> fyke : fuss.

<sup>8</sup> byke : bee-hive.

<sup>9</sup> eldritch : hideous.

ROBERT BURNS, 1759-1796

Ah, Tam ! ah, Tam ! thou'll get thy fairin !<sup>1</sup> 165  
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin !  
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin !  
Kate soon will be a woefu' woman !  
Now do thy speedy utmost, Meg,  
And win the key-stane o' the brig : 170  
There at them thou thy tail may toss,  
A running stream they dare na cross.  
But ere the key-stane she could make,  
The fient<sup>2</sup> a tail she had to shake !  
For Nannie,<sup>3</sup> far before the rest, 175  
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,  
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle<sup>4</sup> ;  
But little wist she Maggie's mettle !  
Ae spring brought off her master hale,  
But left behind her ain grey tail : 180  
The carlin clauthed her by the rump,  
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.  
Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,  
Each man and mother's son, take heed ;  
Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd, 185  
Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,  
Think, ye may buy the joys o'er dear ;  
Remember TAM O' SHANTER'S MEARE !

<sup>1</sup> fairin : reward.

<sup>2</sup> fient : devil.

<sup>3</sup> Nannie : a pleasant young woman who had joined the company of witches that night.

<sup>4</sup> ettle : design.

## SCOTT AND BYRON

SCOTT, 1771-1832—BYRON, 1788-1824

A BOUT the time when Byron awoke to find himself famous Scott made a resolve to give up verse for prose. Scott's own narrative poems had been remarkably popular; but he himself, and the world with him, had recognised in Byron a master of a finer and more varied music on the same strings. It was a true instinct that led Scott to prose. He was a born story-teller, and had a talent for metrical writing that led him to cast his first stories in the form of verse. But, as has been hinted in the general introduction to this book, verse narrative can never rise to any great heights of poetry without the vitalising force of the poet's own spirit—in other words, the lyric individuality. Now prose does not demand the same measure of that quality as is necessary to poetry; and Scott, who is what is often called an "objective" writer, could reveal a genius in the *Waverley Novels* that far outran the talent of *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. Byron, however, infused into his narrative his own wayward and bitter personality. *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are more than stories; they have upon them the deliberate impress of a mind and heart with themselves at war, chafing petulantly at wrongs more imagined than real, and cynical with a worlding's disillusionment.

In *The Siege of Corinth*, however, there is but little of the deliberate "subjective" of Byron. Any comparison or contrast with Scott's poem must be of actual theme or style rather than of inward spirit. Both poets attempted to catch

## SCOTT AND BYRON

something of the metrical effect of *Christabel*; but neither could attain to that subtlety of rhythm of which Coleridge himself became a master by reason of an inborn genius. There is, indeed, a purely outward similarity of narration in the two poems: but where Scott's verse tends to a kind of efficient dullness—the monotony of a tale told too easily—Byron's has in it that true poetic strain which rescues narrative from the too often fatal effects of rhyme and rhythm. In theme both poems are characteristic of their authors. The charm of Scott, in prose as well as verse, lies in the happy abandon of his romance, his open-air delight, his love of native land and the pure simplicities of life. The modern craze for a sordidness in fiction that masquerades as "realism" could have no better corrective than the *Waverley Novels*. Scott is one of the gallant gentlemen of literature; and it is perhaps in personal character that his contrast with Byron is most sharp and definite. It is as long a way from Scott's Borderland to that romantic but ugly East where Byron sulked away his life, as it is from the valiant generosity of the Scots laird to the childish petulance of the young nobleman. The geographical difference is itself apparent in the subject of their poems—the difference as it were between Edinburgh and Constantinople. Perhaps in pursuing any other comparison or contrast, we shall find it profitable to inquire why Scott is scarcely thought of as a poet now, and Byron lives, if he lives at all, on a reputation that was always far greater on the Continent than in England. It is significant that Byron is one of the few literary men

## FITZ-JAMES AND RODERICK DHU

whose fame even a centenary celebration could not revive ; and that when—100 years after his death—a Westminster Abbey memorial was sought for him in 1924, the reputation of his life deprived him of the natural reward of fame.



### FITZ-JAMES AND RODERICK DHU

Fitz-James was brave :—Though to his heart  
The life-blood thrilled with sudden start,  
He manned himself with dauntless air,  
Returned the Chief his haughty stare,  
His back against a rock he bore,                       5  
And firmly placed his foot before :—  
“ Come one, come all ! this rock shall fly  
From its firm base as soon as I.”  
Sir Roderick marked—and in his eyes  
Respect was mingled with surprise,                       10  
And the stern joy which warriors feel  
In foemen worthy of their steel.  
Short space he stood—then waved his hand :  
Down sunk the disappearing band ;  
Each warrior vanished where he stood,                       15  
In broom or bracken, heath or wood ;  
Sunk brand, and spear, and bended bow,  
In osiers pale and copses low ;  
It seemed as if their mother Earth  
Had swallowed up her warlike birth.                       20  
The wind’s last breath had tossed in air  
Pennon, and plaid, and plumage fair—

SIR WALTER SCOTT, 1771-1832

The next but swept a lone hill-side,  
Where heath and fern were waving wide :  
The sun's last glance was glinted back,      2  
From spear and glaive, from targe and jack—  
The next, all unreflected, shone  
On bracken green, and cold grey stone.

Fitz-James looked round—yet scarce believed  
The witness that his sight received ;      3  
Such apparition well might seem  
Delusion of a dreadful dream.  
Sir Roderick in suspense he eyed,  
And to his look the Chief replied,  
“ Fear nought—nay, that I need not say—      3  
But—doubt not aught from mine array.  
Thou art my guest ;—I pledged my word  
As far as Coilantogle ford :  
Nor would I call a clansman's brand      4  
For aid against one valiant hand,  
Though on our strife lay every vale  
Rent by the Saxon from the Gael.  
So move we on ;—I only meant  
To show the reed on which you leant,  
Deeming this path you might pursue      4  
Without a pass from Roderick Dhu.  
They moved ;—I said Fitz-James was brave,  
As ever knight that belted glaive ;  
Yet dare not say, that now his blood  
Kept on its wont and tempered flood,      5  
92

## FITZ-JAMES AND RODERICK DHU

As, following Roderick's stride, he drew  
That seeming lonesome pathway through,  
Which yet, by fearful proof, was rife  
With lances, that, to take his life,  
Waited but signal from a guide,                   55  
So late dishonoured and defied.

Ever, by stealth, his eye sought round  
The vanished guardians of the ground,  
And still, from copse and heather deep,  
Fancy saw spear and broadsword peep,           60  
And in the plover's shrilly strain,  
The signal whistle heard again.  
Nor breathed he free till far behind  
The pass was left ; for then they wind  
Along a wide and level green,                   65  
Where neither tree nor tuft was seen,  
Nor rush nor bush of broom was near,  
To hide a bonnet or a spear.

The Chief in silence strode before,  
And reached that torrent's sounding shore,      70  
Which, daughter of three mighty lakes,  
From Vennachar in silver breaks,  
Sweeps through the plain, and ceaseless mines  
On Bochastle the mouldering lines,  
Where Rome, the Empress of the world,       75  
Of yore her eagle wings unfurled :  
And here his course the Chieftain staid,  
Threw down his target and his plaid,

## SIR WALTER SCOTT, 1771-1832

And to the Lowland warrior said :—  
“ Bold Saxon ! to his promise just,  
Vich-Alpine has discharged his trust.  
This murderous Chief, this ruthless man,  
This head of a rebellious clan,  
Hath led thee safe, through watch and ward,  
Far past Clan-Alpine’s outmost guard.  
Now, man to man, and steel to steel,  
A Chieftain’s vengeance thou shalt feel.  
See, here, all vantageless I stand,  
Armed, like thyself, with single brand :  
For this is Coilantogle ford,  
And thou must keep thee with thy sword.”

The Saxon paused :—“ I ne’er delayed,  
When foeman bade me draw my blade ;  
Nay more, brave Chief, I vowed thy death :  
Yet sure thy fair and generous faith,  
And my deep debt for life preserved,  
A better need have well deserved :  
Can nought but blood our feud atone ?  
Are there no means ? ”—“ No, Stranger, none  
And hear—to fire thy flagging zeal—  
The Saxon cause rests on thy steel :  
For thus spoke Fate, by prophet bred  
Between the living and the dead :  
‘ Who spills the foremost foeman’s life,  
His party conquers in the strife.’ ”—  
“ Then, by my word,” the Saxon said,

FITZ-JAMES AND RODERICK DHU

"Thy riddle is already read.  
 Seek yonder brake beneath the cliff—  
 There lies Red Murdoch, stark and stiff.  
 Thus Fate has solved her prophecy,      110  
 Then yield to Fate, and not to me.  
 To James, at Stirling, let us go,  
 When, if thou wilt be still his foe,  
 Or if the King shall not agree  
 To grant thee grace and favour free,      115  
 I plight mine honour, oath, and word,  
 That, to thy native strengths restored,  
 With each advantage shalt thou stand,  
 That aids thee now to guard thy land."

Dark lightning flashed from Roderick's eye— 120  
 "Soars thy presumption, then, so high,  
 Because a wretched kern ye slew,  
 Homage to name to Roderick Dhu ?  
 He yields not, he, to man nor Fate !  
 Thou add'st but fuel to my hate :—      125  
 My clansman's blood demands revenge.—  
 Not yet prepared ?—By heaven, I change  
 My thought, and hold thy valour light  
 As that of some vain carpet knight,  
 Who ill deserved my courteous care,      130  
 And whose best boast is but to wear  
 A braid of his fair lady's hair."—  
 —"I thank thee, Roderick, for the word !  
 It nerves my heart, it steels my sword ;

SIR WALTER SCOTT, 1771-1832

For I have sworn this braid to stain                          135  
In the best blood that warms thy vein.  
Now, truce, farewell ! and, ruth, begone !  
Yet think not that by thee alone,  
Proud Chief ! can courtesy be shewn ;  
Though not from copse, or heath, or cairn,                  140  
Start at my whistle clansmen stern,  
Of this small horn one feeble blast  
Would fearful odds against thee cast.  
But fear not—doubt not—which thou wilt—  
We try this quarrel hilt to hilt.”                          145  
Then each at once his falchion drew,  
Each on the ground his scabbard threw,  
Each looked to sun, and stream, and plain,  
As what they ne'er might see again ;  
Then foot, and point, and eye opposed,                  150  
In dubious strife they darkly closed:

Ill fared it then with Roderick Dhu,  
That on the field his targe he threw,  
Whose brazen studs and tough bull-hide  
Had death so often dashed aside ;                          155  
For, trained abroad his arms to wield,  
Fitz-James's blade was sword and shield.  
He practised every pass and ward,  
To thrust, to strike, to feint, to guard ;  
While less expert, though stronger far,                  160  
The Gael maintained unequal war.  
Three times in closing strife they stood,

## FITZ-JAMES AND RODERICK DHU

And thrice the Saxon blade drank blood ;  
No stinted draught, no scanty tide,  
The gushing flood the tartans dyed.                   165  
Fierce Roderick felt the fatal drain,  
And showered his blows like wintry rain ;  
And, as firm rock, or castle-roof,  
Against the winter shower is proof,  
The foe, invulnerable still,                           170  
Foiled his wild rage by steady skill ;  
Till, at advantage ta'en, his brand  
Forced Roderick's weapon from his hand,  
And backward borne upon the lea,  
Brought the proud Chieftain to his knee.           175  
“ Now, yield thee, or by Him who made  
The world, thy heart's blood dyes my blade ! ”—  
“ Thy threats, thy mercy, I defy !  
Let recreant yield, who fears to die.”  
—Like adder darting from his coil,                   180  
Like wolf that dashes through the toil,  
Like mountain-cat who guards her young,  
Full at Fitz-James's throat he sprung ;  
Received, but recked not of a wound,  
And locked his arms his foeman round.—           185  
Now, gallant Saxon, hold thine own !  
No maiden's hand is round thee thrown !  
That desperate grasp thy frame might feel,  
Through bars of brass and triple steel !—  
They tug, they strain ! down, down they go,           190  
The Gael above, Fitz-James below.

LORD BYRON, 1788-1824

The Chieftain's gripe his throat compressed,  
His knee was planted in his breast ;  
His clotted locks he backward threw,  
Across his brow his hand he drew, 195  
From blood and mist to clear his sight,  
Then gleamed aloft his dagger bright !—  
—But hate and fury ill supplied  
The stream of life's exhausted tide,  
And all too late the advantage came, 200  
To turn the odds of deadly game ;  
For, while the dagger gleamed on high,  
Reeled soul and sense, reeled brain and eye.  
Down came the blow ! but in the heath  
The erring blade found bloodless sheath. 205  
The struggling foe may now unclasp  
The fainting Chief's relaxing grasp ;  
Unwounded from the dreadful close,  
But breathless all, Fitz-James arose.

From *The Lady of the Lake*

THE STORMING OF CORINTH

The night is past, and shines the sun  
As if that morn were a jocund one,  
Lightly and brightly breaks away  
The Morning from her mantle grey,  
And the Noon will look on a sultry day. 5  
Hark to the trump, and the drum,  
And the mournful sound of the barbarous horn,  
And the flap of the banners, that slit as they're borne,

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

And the neigh of the steed, and the multitude's  
hum,  
And the clash, and the shout, "They come !  
they come !" 10  
The horsetails are plucked from the ground, and  
the sword  
From its sheath ; and they form, and but wait  
for the word.  
Tartar, and Spahi, and Turcoman,  
Strike your tents, and throng to the van ;  
Mount ye, spur ye, skirr the plain, 15  
That the fugitive may flee in vain,  
When he breaks from the town ; and none escape,  
Aged or young, in the Christian shape ;  
While your fellows on foot, in a fiery mass,  
Bloodstain the breach through which they pass.  
The steeds are all bridled, and snort to the rein; 25  
Curved is each neck, and flowing each mane ;  
White is the foam of their champ on the bit :  
The spears are uplifted ; the matches are lit ;  
The cannon are pointed, and ready to roar, 25  
And crush the wall they have crumbled before :  
Forms in his phalanx each Janizar ;  
Alp at their head ; his right arm is bare,  
So is the blade of his scimitar ;  
The khan and the pachas are all at their post, 30  
The vizier himself at the head of the host.  
When the culverin's signal is fired, then on ;  
Leave not in Corinth a living one—

LORD BYRON, 1788-1824

A priest at her altars, a chief in her halls,  
A hearth in her mansions, a stone on her walls. 35  
God and the prophet—Alla Hu !

Up to the skies with that wild halloo :  
“ There the breach lies for passage, the ladder  
to scale ;

And your hands on your sabres, and how should  
ye fail ?

He who first downs with the red cross may crave  
His heart’s dearest wish ; let him ask it, and  
have ! ” 41

Thus uttered Coumourgi, the dauntless vizier ;  
The reply was the brandish of sabre and spear,  
And the shout of fierce thousands in joyous ire :  
Silence—hark to the signal—fire ! 45

As the wolves, that headlong go  
On the stately buffalo,  
Though with fiery eyes, and angry roar,  
And hoofs that stamp, and horns that gore,  
He tramples on earth, or tosses on high 50  
The foremost, who rush on his strength but to  
die :

Thus against the wall they went,  
Thus the first were backward bent ;  
Many a bosom, sheathed in brass,  
Strewed the earth like broken glass, 55  
Shivered by the shot, that tore  
The ground whereon they moved no more :

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

Even as they fell, in files they lay,  
Like the mower's grass at the close of day,  
When his work is done on the levelled plain ; 60  
Such was the fall of the foremost slain.

As the spring-tides, with heavy splash,  
From the cliffs invading dash  
Huge fragments, sapped by the ceaseless flow,  
Till white and thundering down they go, 65  
Like the avalanche's snow  
On the Alpine vales below ;  
Thus at length, outbreathed and worn,  
Corinth's sons were downward borne  
By the long and oft-renewed 70  
Charge of the Moslem multitude.  
In firmness they stood, and in masses they fell,  
Heaped by the host of the infidel,  
Hand to hand, and foot to foot :  
Nothing there, save death, was mute ; 75  
Stroke, and thrust, and flash, and cry  
For quarter, or for victory,  
Mingle there with the volleying thunder,  
Which makes the distant cities wonder  
How the sounding battle goes, 80  
If with them, or for their foes ;  
If they must mourn, or may rejoice,  
In that annihilating voice, 83  
Which pierces the deep hills through and through  
With an echo dread and new :

You might have heard it, on that day,  
 O'er Salamis and Megara ;  
 (We have heard the hearers say),  
 Even unto Piraeus' bay.

From the point of encountering blades to  
 the hilt,  
 Sabres and swords with blood were gilt ;      91  
 But the rampart is won, and the spoil begun,  
 And all but the after carnage done.  
 Shriller shrieks now mingling come  
 From within the plundered dome :      95  
 Hark to the haste of flying feet,  
 That splash in the blood of the slippery street ;  
 But here and there, where 'vantage ground  
 Against the foe may still be found,  
 Desperate groups, of twelve or ten,      100  
 Make a pause, and turn again—  
 With branded backs against the wall,  
 Fiercely stand, or fighting fall.

There stood an old man—his hairs were white,  
 But his veteran arm was full of might :      105  
 So gallantly bore he the brunt of the fray,  
 The dead before him, on that day,  
 In a semicircle lay ;  
 Still he combated unwounded,  
 Though retreating, unsurrounded.      110  
 Many a scar of former fight

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

Lurked beneath his corslet bright ;  
But of every wound his body bore,  
Each and all had been ta'en before :  
Though aged, he was so iron of limb,                   115  
Few of our youth could cope with him ;  
And the foes, whom he singly kept at bay,  
Outnumbered his thin hairs of silver grey.  
From right to left his sabre swept ;  
Many an Othman mother wept                   120  
Sons that were unborn, when dipped  
His weapon first in Moslem gore,  
Ere his years could count a score.  
Of all he might have been the sire  
Who fell that day beneath his ire :                   125  
For, sonless left long years ago,  
His wrath made many a childless foe ;  
And since the day, when in the strait  
His only boy had met his fate,  
His parent's iron hand did doom                   130  
More than a human hecatomb.  
If shades by carnage be appeased,  
Patroclus' spirit less was pleased  
Than his, Minotti's son, who died  
Where Asia's bounds and ours divide.                   135  
Buried he lay, where thousands before  
For thousands of years were inhumed on the  
shore ;  
What of them is left, to tell  
Where they lie, and how they fell ?

Not a stone on their turf, nor a bone in their  
graves ; 140  
But they live in the verse that immortally saves.

Hark to the Allah shout ! a band  
Of the Mussulman bravest and best is at hand :  
Their leader's nervous arm is bare,  
Swifter to smite, and never to spare— 145  
Unclothed to the shoulder it waves them on ;  
Thus in the fight is he ever known :  
Others a gaudier garb may show,  
To tempt the spoil of the greedy foe ;  
Many a hand 's on a richer hilt, 150  
But none on a steel more ruddily gilt ;  
Many a loftier turban may wear—  
Alp is but known by the white arm bare ;  
Look through the thick of the fight, 'tis there !  
There is not a standard on that shore 155  
So well advanced the ranks before ;  
There is not a banner in Moslem war  
Will lure the Delhis half so far ;  
It glances like a falling star !  
Where'er that mighty arm is seen, 160  
The bravest be, or late have been ;  
There the craven cries for quarter  
Vainly to the vengeful Tartar ;  
Or the hero, silent lying,  
Scorns to yield a groan in dying ; 165  
Mustering his last feeble blow  
'Gainst the nearest levelled foe,

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

Though faint beneath the mutual wound,  
Grappling on the gory ground.

Still the old man stood erect, 170

And Alp's career a moment checked.

" Yield thee, Minotti ; quarter take,  
For thine own, thy daughter's sake."

" Never, renegado, never !

Though the life of thy gift would last for ever."

" Francesca !—Oh, my promised bride ! 176

Must she too perish by thy pride ? "

" She is safe"—" Where? where?"—" In heaven;  
From whence thy traitor soul is driven—

Far from thee, and undefiled." 180

Grimly then Minotti smiled,

As he saw Alp staggering bow

Before his words, as with a blow.

" O God ! when died she ? "—" Yesternight—

Nor weep I for her spirit's flight : 185

None of my pure race shall be

Slaves to Mahomet and thee—

Come on ! "—That challenge is in vain—

Alp's already with the slain !

While Minotti's words were wreaking 190

More revenge in bitter speaking

Than his falchion's point had found,

Had the time allowed to wound

From within the neighbouring porch

Of a long-defended church, 194

LORD BYRON, 1788-1824

Where the last and desperate few  
Would the failing fight renew,  
The sharp shot dashed Alp to the ground ;  
Ere an eye could view the wound  
That crashed through the brain of the Infidel,  
Round he spun, and down he fell ;                   201  
A flash like fire within his eyes  
Blazed, as he bent no more to rise,  
And then eternal darkness sunk  
Through all the palpitating trunk ;               205  
Nought of life left, save a quivering  
Where his limbs were slightly shivering :  
They turned him on his back ; his breast  
And brow were stained with gore and  
dust,  
And through his lips the life-blood oozed,           210  
From its deep veins lately loosed ;  
But in his pulse there was no throb,  
Nor on his lips one dying sob ;  
Sigh, nor word, nor struggling breath  
Heralded his way to death :                       215  
Ere his very thought could pray,  
Unaneled he passed away,  
Without a hope from mercy's aid,  
To the last—a Renegade.

Fearfully the yell arose  
Of his followers, and his foes ;  
These in joy, in fury those :

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

- Then again in conflict mixing,  
Clashing swords, and spears transfixing,  
Interchanged the blow and thrust,      225  
Hurling warriors in the dust.  
Street by street, and foot by foot,  
Still Minotti dares dispute  
The latest portion of the land  
Left beneath his high command ;      230  
With him, aiding heart and hand,  
The remnant of his gallant band.  
Still the church is tenable,  
Whence issued late the fated ball  
That half avenged the city's fall,      235  
When Alp, her fiercer assailant, fell :  
Thither bending sternly back,  
They leave before a bloody track ;  
And, with their faces to the foe,  
Dealing wounds with every blow,      240  
The chief, and his retreating train,  
Join to those within the fane ;  
There they yet may breathe awhile,  
Sheltered by the massy pile.
- Brief breathing-time ! the turbanned host,      245  
With added ranks and raging boast,  
Press onwards with such strength and heat,  
Their numbers balk their own retreat ;  
For narrow the way that led to the spot      249  
Where still the Christians yielded not ;  
      107

- And the foremost, if fearful, may vainly try  
 Through the massy column to turn and fly ;  
 They perforce must do or die.  
 They die ; but ere their eyes could close,  
 Avengers o'er their bodies rose ; 255  
 Fresh and furious, fast they fill  
 The ranks unthinned, though slaughtered still ;  
 And faint the weary Christians wax  
 Before the still-renewed attacks :  
 And now the Othmans gain the gate ; 260  
 Still resists its iron weight,  
 And still, all deadly aimed and hot,  
 From every crevice comes the shot ;  
 From every shattered window pour  
 The volleys of the sulphurous shower : 265  
 But the portal wavering grows, and weak—  
 The iron yields, the hinges creak—  
 It bends—it falls—and all is o'er ;  
 Lost Corinth may resist no more !
- Darkly, sternly, and all alone, 270  
 Minotti stood o'er the altar stone :  
 Madonna's face upon him shone,  
 Painted in heavenly hues above,  
 With eyes of light and looks of love ;  
 And placed upon that holy shrine 275  
 To fix our thoughts on things divine,  
 When pictured there, we kneeling see  
 Her, and the boy-God on her knee,

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

Smiling sweetly on each prayer  
To heaven, as if to wast it there. 280  
Still she smiled ; even now she smiles,  
Though slaughter streams along her aisles :  
Minotti lifted his aged eye,  
And made the sign of a cross with a sigh,  
Then seized a torch which blazed thereby ; 285  
And still he stood, while, with steel and flame,  
Inward and onward the Mussulman came.

The vaults beneath the mosaic stone  
Contained the dead of ages gone ;  
Their names were on the graven floor, 290 .  
But now illegible with gore ;  
The carved crests, and curious hues  
The varied marble's veins diffuse,  
Were smeared, and slippery—stained, and strown  
With broken swords, and helms o'erthrown : 295  
There were dead above, and the dead below  
Lay cold in many a coffined row ;  
You might see them piled in sable state,  
By a pale light through a gloomy grate ;  
But War had entered their dark caves, 300  
And stored along the vaulted graves  
Her sulphurous treasures, thickly spread  
In masses by the fleshless dead :  
Here, throughout the siege, had been  
The Christian's chiefest magazine ; 305  
To these a late-formed train now led,

LORD BYRON, 1788-1824

Minotti's last and stern resource,  
Against the foe's o'erwhelming force.

- The foe came on, and few remain  
To strive, and those must strive in vain :      310  
For lack of further lives, to slake  
The thirst of vengeance now awake,  
With barbarous blows they gash the dead,  
And lop the already lifeless head,  
And fell the statues from their niche,      315  
And spoil the shrines of offering rich,  
And from each other's rude hands wrest  
The silver vessels saints had blessed.  
To the high altar on they go ;  
Oh, but it made a glorious show !      320  
On its table still behold  
The cup of consecrated gold ;  
Massy and deep, a glittering prize,  
Brightly it sparkles to plunderers' eyes :  
That morn it held the holy wine,      325  
Converted by Christ to His blood so divine,  
Which His worshippers drank at the break  
of day,  
To shrive their souls ere they joined in the fray.  
Still a few drops within it lay ;  
And round the sacred table glow      330  
Twelve lofty lamps, in splendid row,  
From the purest metal cast ;  
A spoil—the richest, and the last.

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

- So near they came, the nearest stretched  
To grasp the spoil he almost reached,                    335  
When old Minotti's hand  
Touched with the torch the train—  
'Tis fired !  
Spire, vaults, the shrine, the spoil, the slain.  
The turbanned victors, the Christian band, 340  
All that of living or dead remain,  
Hurled on high with the shivered fane,  
In one wild roar expired !  
The shattered town—the walls thrown down—  
The waves a moment backward bent—                    345  
The hills that shake, although unrent,  
As if an earthquake passed—  
The thousand shapeless things all driven  
In cloud and flame athwart the heaven,  
By that tremendous blast—                                350  
Proclaimed the desperate conflict o'er  
On that too long afflicted shore :  
Up to the sky like rockets go  
All that mingled there below :  
Many a tall and goodly man,                            355  
Scorched and shrivelled to a span,  
When he fell to earth again  
Like a cinder strewed the plain :  
Down the ashes shower like rain ;  
Some fell in the gulf, which received the  
sprinkles    360  
With a thousand circling wrinkles ;

LORD BYRON, 1788-1824

- Some fell on the shore, but, far away,  
Scattered o'er the isthmus lay ;  
Christian or Moslem, which be they ?  
Let their mothers see and say ! 365.
- When in cradled rest they lay,  
And each nursing mother smiled  
On the sweet sleep of her child,  
Little deemed she such a day  
Would rend those tender limbs away. 370
- Not the matrons that them bore  
Could discern their offspring more ;  
That one moment left no trace  
More of human form or face  
Save a scattered scalp or bone : 375
- And down came blazing rafters, strown  
Around, and many a falling stone,  
Deeply dinted in the clay,  
All blackened there and reeking lay.
- All the living things that heard 380  
That deadly earth-shock disappeared :  
The wild birds flew : the wild dogs fled,  
And howling left the unburied dead ;  
The camels from their keepers broke ;
- The distant steer forsook the yoke— 385  
The nearer steed plunged o'er the plain,  
And burst his girth, and tore his rein ;  
The bull-frog's note, from out the marsh,  
Deep-mouthing arose, and doubly harsh ;  
The wolves yelled on the caverned hill 390

## THE STORMING OF CORINTH

Where echo rolled in thunder still ;  
The jackal's troop, in gathered cry,  
Bayed from afar complainingly,  
With a mixed and mournful sound,  
Like crying babe, and beaten hound :                   395  
With sudden wing, and ruffled breast,  
The eagle left his rocky nest,  
And mounted nearer to the sun,  
The clouds beneath him seemed so dun ;  
Their smoke assailed his startled beak,               400  
And made him higher soar and shriek—  
Thus was Corinth lost and won !

From *The Siege of Corinth*

## CHRISTABEL

COLERIDGE was by fits and starts a magician. He has left to English literature the legacy of three great poems, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*; and two of these are unfinished. The last, he tells us, he actually dreamt, and, while writing the words down the next day, was disturbed by "a person from Porlock." Though he had dreamt a whole poem he could never remember the end of it after that untimely visit; so that *Kubla Khan* remains a magnificent fragment. *Christabel* he certainly never did, and probably never could, finish; and even *The Ancient Mariner* was, perhaps, "rounded off"

by Wordsworth. That “person from Porlock” is a symbol of the old disturbance that seemed to stultify so much of his work. Coleridge lived in two worlds; and tumbled down too often from the ethereal region of his romance to maintain, except fitfully and rarely, that pure spirit which, in English, belongs to him alone. Even the second part of *Christabel*, although it contains the great passage on friendship, bears traces of an inevitable descent from the marvellous supernatural of the first part; and we are sometimes glad that Coleridge left it there, being aware of his own peril.

It is impossible to describe, or appreciate, except in thought, the magic of the first part. The interpretation of the story does not matter; its very obscurity adds to the wonder of the poem. Here are beings of another world,—the lovely Lady Christabel, the sinister Geraldine, the toothless mastiff of whom some say “she sees my lady’s shroud.” The very air is bewitched; the moonlight a dim and awful presence. And apart from the true supernatural, there are wonders of description. No other poet in English has such suggestive and simple loveliness as—

“*The night is chill, the cloud is grey,  
'Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the Spring comes slowly up this way,*”

or so beautiful a “lilt”—for Coleridge wrought his lines with deliberate cunning, as he tells us in his note to *Christabel*—as runs in the lines:

"There is not wind enough to twirl  
 The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
 That dances as often as dance it can,  
 Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
 On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky."

Only here and there did Coleridge himself repeat such miracles—in *The Ancient Mariner* sometimes, and in the last lines of *Frost at Midnight*:

"Whether the eave-drops fall  
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
 Or if the secret ministry of frost  
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
 Quietly shining to the quiet moon."

It is, perhaps, interesting to remember how *Christabel* influenced Keats, and Tennyson through Keats. *La Belle Dame sans merci* and even *Lamia* (see page 128) borrow—magnificently and finely—something of Coleridge's magic. Nor can we read Keats's description of Madeline's room in the *Eve of St. Agnes*, with all its wealth of colour, without the memory of Christabel's—

"Chamber carved so curiously,  
 Carved with figures strange and sweet,  
 All made out of the carver's brain,  
 For a lady's chamber meet :  
 The lamp with twofold silver chain  
 Is fastened to an angel's feet."



'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,  
 And the owls have awakened the crowing cock ;

Tu-whit!—Tu-whoo!  
And hark, again! the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew.

5

Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,  
Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;  
From her kennel beneath the rock  
She maketh answer to the clock,  
Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour; 10  
Ever and aye, by shine and shower,  
Sixteen short howls, not over loud;  
Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.

Is the night chilly and dark?  
The night is chilly, but not dark. 15  
The thin grey cloud is spread on high.  
It covers but not hides the sky.  
The moon is behind, and at the full;  
And yet she looks both small and dull.  
The night is chill, the cloud is grey: 20  
'Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

The lovely lady, Christabel,  
Whom her father loves so well,  
What makes her in the wood so late, 25  
A furlong from the castle gate?  
She had dreams all yesternight  
Of her own betrothed knight;  
And she in the midnight wood will pray  
For the weal of her lover that's far away. 30

## CHRISTABEL

She stole along, she nothing spoke,  
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,  
And naught was green upon the oak,  
But moss and rarest mistletoe :  
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,                  35  
And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,  
The lovely lady, Christabel !  
It moaned as near, as near can be,  
But what it is, she cannot tell.—                  40  
On the other side it seems to be,  
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

The night is chill ; the forest bare :  
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak ?  
There is not wind enough in the air                  45  
To move away the ringlet curl  
From the lovely lady's cheek—  
There is not wind enough to twirl  
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can,                  50  
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel !  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well !  
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,                  55  
And stole to the other side of the oak.  
What sees she there ?

S. T. COLERIDGE, 1772-1834

There she sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone : 60  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare ;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair. 65  
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see  
A lady so richly clad as she—  
Beautiful exceedingly !

" Mary mother, save me now ! "  
(Said Christabel) " And who art thou ? " 70

The lady strange made answer meet,  
And her voice was faint and sweet :—  
" Have pity on my sore distress,  
I scarce can speak for weariness :  
Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear ! " 75  
Said Christabel, " How camest thou here ? "  
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,  
Did thus pursue her answer meet :—  
" My sire is of a noble line,  
And my name is Geraldine : 80  
Five warriors seized me yestermorn,  
Me, even me, a maid forlorn :  
They choked my cries with force and fright,  
And tied me on a palfrey white.

## CHRISTABEL

The palfrey was as fleet as wind, 85

And they rode furiously behind.

They spurred amain, their steeds were white ;

And once we crossed the shade of night.

As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,

I have no thought what men they be ; 90

Nor do I know how long it is

(For I have lain entranced I wis)

Since one, the tallest of the five,

Took me from the palfrey's back,

A weary woman, scarce alive. 95

Some muttered words his comrades spoke :

He placed me underneath this oak,

He swore they would return with haste ;

Whither they went I cannot tell—

I thought I heard, some minutes past, 100

Sounds as of a castle-bell.

Stretch forth thy hand " (thus ended she),

" And help a wretched maid to flee."

Then Christabel stretched forth her hand

And comforted fair Geraldine : 105

" O well, bright dame ! may you command

The service of Sir Leoline ;

And gladly our stout chivalry

Will he send forth and friends withal

To guide and guard you safe and free 110

Home to your noble father's hall."

She rose : and forth with steps they passed  
 That strove to be, and were not, fast.  
 Her gracious stars the lady blest,  
 And thus spake on sweet Christabel :      115  
 " All our household are at rest,  
 The hall as silent as the cell<sup>1</sup> ;  
 Sir Leoline is weak in health  
 And may not well awakened be,  
 But we will move as if in stealth,      120  
 And I beseech your courtesy,  
 This night to share your couch with me."

They crossed the moat, and Christabel  
 Took the key that fitted well ;  
 A little door she opened straight,      125  
 All in the middle of the gate ;  
 The gate that was ironed within and without,  
 Where an army in battle array had marched out.  
 The lady sank, belike through pain,  
 And Christabel with might and main      130  
 Lifted her up, a weary weight,  
 Over the threshold of the gate :  
 Then the lady rose again,  
 And moved, as she were not in pain.

So free from danger, free from fear,      135  
 They crossed the court : right glad they were.  
 And Christabel devoutly cried  
 To the lady by her side,

<sup>1</sup> cell : a small room in a monastery.

CHRISTABEL

“ Praise we the Virgin all divine  
Who hath rescued thee from thy distress ! ” 140  
“ Alas, alas ! ” said Geraldine,  
“ I cannot speak for weariness.”  
So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court : right glad they were.

Outside her kennel the mastiff old                    145  
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.  
The mastiff old did not awake,  
Yet she an angry moan did make !  
And what can ail the mastiff bitch ?  
Never till now she uttered yell                    150  
Beneath the eye of Christabel.  
Perhaps it is the owlet’s scritch :  
For what can ail the mastiff bitch ?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,  
Pass as lightly as you will !                    155  
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,  
Amid their own white ashes lying ;  
But when the lady passed, there came  
A tongue of light, a fit <sup>1</sup> of flame ;  
And Christabel saw the lady’s eye,                    160  
And nothing else saw she thereby,  
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,  
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.  
“ O softly tread,” said Christabel,  
“ My father seldom sleepeth well.”                    165

<sup>1</sup> fit : flash.

S. T. COLERIDGE, 1772-1834

Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,  
And, jealous of the listening air,  
They steal their way from stair to stair,  
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,  
And now they pass the Baron's room,      170  
As still as death, with stifled breath !  
And now have reached her chamber door ;  
And now doth Geraldine press down  
The rushes of the chamber floor.

The moon shines dim in the open air,      175  
And not a moonbeam enters here.

But they without its light can see  
The chamber carved so curiously,  
Carved with figures strange and sweet,  
All made out of the carver's brain,      180  
For a lady's chamber meet :

The lamp with twofold silver chain  
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

The silver lamp burns dead and dim ;  
But Christabel the lamp will trim.      185

She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,  
And left it swinging to and fro,  
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,  
Sank down upon the floor below.

" O weary lady, Geraldine,  
I pray you, drink this cordial wine !  
It is a wine of virtuous powers ;  
My mother made it of wild flowers."

"And will your mother pity me,  
Who am a maiden most forlorn ? " 195

Christabel answered—"Woe is me !  
She died the hour that I was born.  
I have heard the grey-haired friar tell,  
How on her death-bed she did say,  
That she should hear the castle-bell 200  
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.

O mother dear ! that thou wert here ! "  
"I would," said Geraldine, "she were ! "  
But soon with altered voice, said she—  
"Off, wandering mother ! Peak and pine ! 205  
I have power to bid thee flee."

Alas ! what ails poor Geraldine ?  
Why stares she with unsettled eye ?  
Can she the bodiless dead espy ?  
And why with hollow voice cries she, 210  
"Off, woman, off ! this hour is mine—  
Though thou her guardian spirit be,  
Off, woman, off ! 'tis given to me."

Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side.  
And raised to heaven her eyes so blue— 215  
"Alas !" said she, "this ghastly ride—  
Dear lady ! it hath wildered you ! "  
The lady wiped her moist cold brow,  
And faintly said, " 'Tis over now ! "

Again the wild-flower wine she drank : 220  
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,

And from the floor whereon she sank,  
The lofty lady stood upright ;  
She was most beautiful to see,  
Like a lady of a far countrée.

225

And thus the lofty lady spake—  
“ All they, who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabel !  
And you love them, and for their sake,  
And for the good which me befell,  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well.  
But now unrobe yourself ; for I  
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.”

230

Quoth Christabel, “ So let it be ! ”  
And as the lady bade, did she.  
Her gentle limbs did she undress,  
And lay down in her loveliness.

235

But through her brain of weal and woe  
So many thoughts moved to and fro,  
That vain it were her lids to close ;  
So half-way from the bed she rose,  
And on her elbow did recline  
To look at the lady Geraldine.

240

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around ;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud

245

Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
 The cincture from beneath her breast :  
 Her silken robe, and inner vest,                   250  
 Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
 Behold ! her bosom and half her side—  
 A sight to dream of, not to tell !  
 O shield her ! shield sweet Christabel !

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs ;           255  
 Ah ! what a stricken look was hers !  
 Deep from within she seems half-way  
 To lift some weight with sick assay,  
 And eyes the maid and seeks delay ;  
 Then suddenly as one defied                   260  
 Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
 And lay down by the Maiden's side !—  
 And in her arms the maid she took,  
 Ah wel-a-day !

And with low voice and doleful look           265

These words did say :

“ In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell ,  
 Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel !  
 Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,  
 This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow ;

But vainly thou warrest,                   271

For this is alone in

Thy power to declare,

That in the dim forest

Thou heard'st a low moaning,

## JOHN KEATS, 1795-1821

And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair.  
And didst bring her home with thee in love and  
in charity,  
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air."

## LAMIA

WHEN Keats published his first narrative poem, *Endymion*, in 1818, the critics told him to get back to his medicine bottles. A few months proved that his own instinct for poetry and aversion to the dispensary were sound ; for the doctor's apprentice became, in the space of a few troubled years, a great master of another craft. He has left us a volume of poetry which never, except perhaps in a few experimental and occasional verses, entirely lacks his fundamental conception of that beauty which he said was truth ; and two or three of his lyrics stand among the finest poems in our language. He once counselled Shelley to "load every rift of his subject with ore." In that phrase he summarised his own aim and practice ; for the rifts in his work gleam with an abundance of ore that only by the power of his genius becomes the refined gold of beauty.

There were three great influences on his life and work. The first was what he himself called "the beautiful mythology of Greece"—that mighty treasure of the ancient world which was first opened to him through Chapman's *Homer*. That remained, throughout the brief years of his writing, his chief inspiration ; but in the

actual practice of poetry—his language and technique—he was profoundly influenced first by Spenser and afterwards by Milton. His chief narrative poems illustrate fairly clearly the development of his art. At first he had to combat a false enthusiasm encouraged by his loyal friend yet evil exemplar, Leigh Hunt. A natural and common reaction to the “Pope school” of poetry, those who—

“Swayed about upon a rocking-horse  
And called it Pegasus,”

drove him to a licence of form and expression that bade fair to ruin his work. Leigh Hunt had written some of his long, now forgotten poems in a kind of decadent “free” heroic couplet which Keats retains in *Endymion* and *Lamia*. But the genius in Keats soon outgrew this trumpery freedom, which even in *Lamia* is tempered with dignity and control. *Isabella* is written in a familiar *ottava rima*, an eight-lined stanza form beloved of Byron; *The Eve of St. Agnes*, perhaps his finest narrative poem, is Spenserian in both its stanza and its language; and the fragment *Hyperion* is more than touched with the grandeur of *Paradise Lost*.

*Lamia* represents the work of a Keats who had travelled half-way to his quick maturity. We have already seen how the influence of Leigh Hunt lingers in its form. Perhaps, too, its theme is the outcome of the youthful “mawkishness” at which Keats himself hints in his Preface to *Endymion*, as well as of a certain morbidity that characterises many of his poems. But the story

## JOHN KEATS, 1795-1821

is beautifully told; it contains magnificent passages of that vigorous, colourful description in which Keats excelled. Nothing can better illustrate this than the lines (156-166) where he describes the serpent's change into a woman, and the picture of the banquet-room (ll. 173-190).

A familiar passage in the poem (ll. 222-238) illustrates the attitude of much of the early nineteenth-century poetry to the new spirit of scientific inquiry that was then abroad. So Wordsworth, a few years earlier, had in a famous sonnet longed for a return from the materialism of England to the romance of "a creed outworn"; Blake had written of the "dark Satanic mills"; and here Keats, impatient of the physies that would analyse the rainbow, emphasises and bewails the division of poetry and science. It was left to later poets, led by Tennyson, to reconcile what earlier prejudice, coupled with ignorance, sought to keep apart.



### PART I

Upon a time, before the faery broods  
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous  
woods,  
Before King Oberon's bright diadem,  
Sceptre, and mantle, clasped with dewy gem,  
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns      5  
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd  
lawns,

The ever-smitten Hermes empty left  
His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft:

From high Olympus had he stolen light,  
 On this side of Jove's clouds, to escape the sight  
 Of his great summoner, and made retreat      11  
 Into a forest on the shores of Crete.

For somewhere in that sacred island dwelt  
 A nymph, to whom all hoofed Satyrs knelt ;  
 At whose white feet the languid Tritons poured  
 Pearls, while on land they withered and adored.  
 Fast by the springs where she to bathe was wont,  
 And in those meads, where sometimes she might  
   haunt,

Were strown rich gifts, unknown to any Muse,  
 Though Fancy's casket were unlocked to choose.  
 Ah, what a world of love was at her feet !      21

So Hermes thought, and a celestial heat  
 Burnt from his winged heels to either ear,  
 That from a whiteness, as the lilly clear,  
 Blushed into roses 'mid his golden hair,      25  
 Fallen in jealous curls about his shoulders bare.

From vale to vale, from wood to wood, he flew,  
 Breathing upon the flowers his passion new,  
 And wound with many a river to its head,  
 To find where this sweet nymph prepared her  
   secret bed :      30

In vain; the sweet nymph might nowhere be found,  
 And so he rested, on the lonely ground,  
 Pensive, and full of painful jealousies  
 Of the Wood-Gods, and even the very trees.

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There, as he stood, he heard a mournful voice,  
Such as once heard, in gentle heart, destroys 36  
All pain but pity : thus the lone voice spake :  
" When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake !  
When move in a sweet body fit for life,  
And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife 40  
Of hearts and lips ! Ah, miserable me ! "  
The God, dove-footed, glided silently  
Round bush and tree, soft-brushing, in his  
speed,  
The taller grasses and full-flowering weed,  
Until he found a palpitating snake, 45  
Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,  
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue ;  
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,  
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred ; 50  
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,  
Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed  
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—  
So rainbow-sided, touched with miseries,  
She seemed, at once, some penanced lady elf, 55  
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.  
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire  
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar :  
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet !  
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls 60  
complete :

And for her eyes : what could such eyes do there  
 But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair ?  
 As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.  
 Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake  
 Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's  
 sake,

65

And thus ; while Hermes on his pinions lay,  
 Like a stooped falcon ere he takes his prey.

" Fair Hermes, crowned with feathers, fluttering light,

I had a splendid dream of thee last night :  
 I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,              70  
 Among the Gods, upon Olympus old,  
 The only sad one ; for thou didst not hear  
 The soft, lute-fingered Muses chaunting clear,  
 Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,  
 Deaf to his throbbing throat's long, long melodious moan.

75

I dreamt I saw thee, robed in purple flakes,  
 Break amorous through the clouds, as morning  
 breaks,

And, swiftly as a bright Phœbean dart,  
 Strike for the Cretan isle ; and here thou art !  
 Too gentle Hermes, hast thou found the maid ? "  
 Whereat the star of Lethe not delayed              81  
 His rosy eloquence, and thus inquired :  
 " Thou smooth-lipped serpent, surely high inspired !

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Thou beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,  
Possess whatever bliss thou canst devise,      85  
Telling me only where my nymph is fled,—  
Where she doth breathe ! ” “ Bright planet, thou  
hast said,”

Returned the snake, “ but seal with oaths, fair  
God ! ”

“ I swear,” said Hermes, “ by my serpent rod,  
And by thine eyes, and by thy starry crown ! ” 90  
Light flew his earnest words, among the blossoms  
blown.

Then thus again the brilliance feminine :  
“ Too frail of heart ! for this lost nymph of  
thine,

Free as the air, invisibly, she strays  
About these thornless wilds ; her pleasant days  
She tastes unseen ; unseen her nimble feet      96  
Leave traces in the grass and flowers sweet ;  
From weary tendrils, and bowed branches green,  
She plucks the fruit unseen, she bathes unseen :  
And by my power is her beauty veiled      100  
To keep it unaffronted, unassailed  
By the love-glances of unlovely eyes,  
Of Satyrs, Fauns, and bleared Silenus' sighs.  
Pale grew her immortality, for woe  
Of all these lovers, and she grieved so      105  
I took compassion on her, bade her steep  
Her hair in weird syrups, that would keep  
Her loveliness invisible, yet free

To wander as she loves, in liberty.

Thou shalt behold her, Hermes, thou alone, 110  
If thou wilt, as thou swearest, grant my boon ! ”

Then, once again, the charmed God began  
An oath, and through the serpent’s ears it ran  
Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian.

Ravished, she lifted her Circcean head, 115

Blushed a live damask, and swift-lisping said :

“ I was a woman, let me have once more  
A woman’s shape, and charming as before.

I love a youth of Corinth—O the bliss !

Give me my woman’s form, and place me where  
he is. 120

Stoop, Hermes, let me breathe upon thy brow,  
And thou shalt see thy sweet nymph even now.”

The God on half-shut feathers sank serene,  
She breathed upon his eyes, and swift was seen  
Of both the guarded nymph near-smiling on the  
green. 125

It was no dream ; or say a dream it was,  
Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass  
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.

One warm, flushed moment, hovering, it might  
seem

Dashed by the wood-nymph’s beauty, so he  
burned ; 130

Then, lighting on the printless verdure, turned  
To the swooned serpent, and with languid arm,  
Delicate, put to proof the lithe Caducean charm.

So done, upon the nymph his eyes he bent  
 Full of adoring tears and blandishment,      135  
 And towards her stept : she, like a moon in  
 wane,

Faded before him, cowered, nor could restrain  
 Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower  
 That faints into itself at evening hour :  
 But the God fostering her chilled hand,      140  
 She felt the warmth, her eyelids opened bland,  
 And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,  
 Bloomed, and gave up her honey to the lees.  
 Into the green-recessed woods they flew ;  
 Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do.      145

Lest to herself, the serpent now began  
 To change ; her elfin blood in madness ran,  
 Her mouth foamed, and the grass, therewith  
 besprent,

Withered at dew so sweet and virulent ;  
 Her eyes in torture fixed, and anguish drear, 150  
 Hot, glazed, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,  
 Flashed phosphor and sharp sparks without one  
 cooling tear.

The colours all inflamed throughout her train,  
 She writhed about, convulsed with scarlet pain :  
 A deep volcanian yellow took the place      155  
 Of all her milder-mooned body's grace ;  
 And, as the lava ravishes the mead,  
 Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede ;

Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,

Eclipsed her crescents, and licked up her stars :  
So that, in moments few, she was undrest      161  
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,  
And rubious-argent ; of all these bereft,  
Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.

Still shone her crown ; that vanished, also she  
Melted and disappeared as suddenly ;      166  
And in the air, her new voice luting soft,  
Cried, " Lycius ! gentle Lycius ! "—Borne aloft  
With the bright mists about the mountains hoar  
These words dissolved : Crete's forest heard no  
more.    170

Whither fled Lamia, now a lady bright,  
A full-born beauty new and exquisite ?  
She fled into that valley they pass o'er  
Who go to Corinth from Cenchreas' shore ;  
And rested at the foot of those wild hills,      175  
The rugged founts of the Peraean rills,  
And of that other ridge whose barren back  
Stretches, with all its mist and cloudy rack,  
South-westward to Cleone. There she stood  
About a young bird's flutter from a wood,      180  
Fair, on a sloping green of mossy tread,  
By a clear pool, wherein she passioned  
To see herself escaped from so sore ills,  
While her robes flaunted with the daffodils.

Ah, happy Lycius!—for she was a maid 185  
 More beautiful than ever twisted braid,  
 Or sighed, or blushed, or on spring-flowered lea  
 Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy :  
 A virgin purest lipped, yet in the lore  
 Of love deep learned to the red heart's core : 190  
 Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain  
 To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain ;  
 Define their pettish limits, and estrange  
 The points of contact, and swift counter-change ;  
 Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart 195  
 Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art ;—  
 As though in Cupid's college she had spent  
 Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unsheathe,  
 And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.

Why this fair creature chose so fairly 200  
 By the wayside to linger, we shall see ;  
 But first 'tis fit to tell how she could muse  
 And dream, when in the serpent prison-house,  
 Of all she list, strange or magnificent :  
 How, ever, where she willed, her spirit went ;  
 Whether to saint Elysium, or where 205  
 Down through tress-lifting waves the Nereids  
 fair  
 Wind into Thetis' bower by many a pearly stair ;  
 Or where God Bacchus drains his cups divine,  
 Stretched out, at ease, beneath a glutinous  
 pine ; 210

Or where in Pluto's gardens palatine  
 Mulciber's columns gleam in far piazzian line.  
 And sometimes into cities she would send  
 Her dream, with feast and rioting to blend ;  
 And once, while among mortals dreaming thus,  
 She saw the young Corinthian Lycius      216  
 Charioting foremost in the envious race,  
 Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,  
 And fell into a swooning love of him.

Now on the moth-time of that evening dim    220  
 He would return that way, as well she knew,  
 To Corinth from the shore ; for freshly blew  
 The eastern soft wind, and his galley now  
 Grated the quaystones with her brazen prow  
 In port Cenchreas, from Egina isle      225  
 Fresh anchored ; whither he had been awhile  
 To sacrifice to Jove, whose temple there  
 Waits with high marble doors for blood and  
 incense rare.

Jove heard his vows, and bettered his desire ;  
 For by some freakful chance he made retire    230  
 From his companions, and set forth to walk,  
 Perhaps grown wearied of their Corinth talk :  
 Over the solitary hills he fared,  
 Thoughtless at first, but ere eve's star appeared  
 His phantasy was lost, where reason fades,    235  
 In the calmed twilight of Platonic shades.  
 Lamia beheld him coming, near, more near—  
 Close to her passing, in indifference drear,

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His silent sandals swept the mossy green ;  
So neighboured to him, and yet so unseen      240  
She stood : he passed, shut up in mysteries,  
His mind wrapped like his mantle, while her eyes  
Followed his steps, and her neck regal white  
Turned—syllabbling thus, “ Ah, Lycius bright,  
And will you leave me on the hills alone ?      245  
Lycius, look back ! and be some pity shown.”  
He did ; not with cold wonder fearingly,  
But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice ;  
For so delicious were the words she sung,  
It seemed he had loved them a whole summer  
long :      250  
And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,  
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,  
And still the cup was full,—while he, afraid  
Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid  
Due adoration, thus began to adore ;      255  
Her soft look growing coy, she saw his chain  
so sure :  
“ Leave thee alone ! Look back ! Ah ! God-  
dess, see  
Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee !  
For pity do not this sad heart belie—  
Even as thou vanishest so I shall die.      260  
Stay ! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay !  
To thy far wishes will thy streams obey :  
Stay ! though the greenest woods be thy domain,  
Alone they can drink up the morning rain :

Though a descended Pleiad, will not one      265  
 Of thine harmonious sisters keep in tune  
 Thy spheres, and as thy silver proxy shine ?  
 So sweetly to these ravished ears of mine  
 Came thy swift greeting, that if thou shouldst  
 fade

Thy memory will waste me to a shade :—      270  
 For pity do not melt ! ”—“ If I should stay,”  
 Said Lamia, “ here, upon this floor of clay,  
 And pain my steps upon these flowers too rough,  
 What canst thou say or do of charm enough  
 To dull the nice remembrance of my home ?      275  
 Thou canst not ask me with thee here to roam  
 Over these hills and vales, where no joy is,—  
 Empty of immortality and bliss !  
 Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know  
 That finer spirits cannot breathe below      280  
 In human climes, and live : Alas ! poor youth,  
 What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe  
 My essence ? What serener palaces,  
 Where I may all my many senses please,  
 And by mysterious sleights a hundred thirsts  
 appease ?      285

It cannot be—Adieu ! ” So said, she rose  
 Tiptoe with white arms spread. He, sick to lose  
 The amorous promise of her lone complain,  
 Swooned, murmuring of love, and pale with pain.  
 The cruel lady, without any show      290  
 Of sorrow for her tender favourite’s woe,

But rather, if her eyes could brighter be,  
 With brighter eyes and slow amenity,  
 Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh  
 The life she had so tangled in her mesh :      295  
 And as he from one trance was wakening  
 Into another, she began to sing,  
 Happy in beauty, life, and love, and everything,  
 A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres,  
 While, like held breath, the stars drew in their  
 panting fires.      300

And then she whispered in such trembling tone,  
 As those who, safe together, met alone  
 For the first time through many anguished days,  
 Use other speech than looks ; bidding him raise  
 His drooping head, and clear his soul of doubt,  
 For that she was a woman, and without      306  
*Any more subtle fluid in her veins*  
 Than throbbing blood, and that the self-same,  
 pains

Inhabited her frail-strung heart as his.  
 And next she wondered how his eyes could miss  
 Her face so long in Corinth, where, she said,      311  
 She dwelt but half-retired, and there had led  
 Days happy as the gold coin could invent  
 Without the aid of love ; yet in content  
 Till she saw him, as once she passed him by,      315  
 Where 'gainst a column he leant thoughtfully  
 At Venus' temple porch, 'mid baskets heaped  
 Of amorous herbs and flowers, newly reaped

Late on that eve, as 'twas the night before  
 The Adonian feast ; whereof she saw no more,  
 But wept alone those days, for why should she  
 adore ?

321

Lycius from death awoke into amaze,  
 To see her still, and singing so sweet lays ;  
 Then from amaze into delight he fell  
 To hear her whisper woman's lore so well ;

325

And every word she spake enticed him on  
 To unperplexed delight and pleasure known.  
 Let the mad poets say whate'er they please  
 Of the sweets of Faeries, Peris, Goddesses,  
 There is not such a treat among them all,

330

Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,  
 As a real woman, lineal indeed  
 From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.  
 Thus gentle Lamia judged, and judged aright,  
 That Lycius could not love in half a fright,

335

So threw the goddess off, and won his heart  
 More pleasantly by playing woman's part,  
 With no more awe than what her beauty  
 gave,

That, while it smote, still guaranteed to save.

Lycius to all made eloquent reply,

340

Marrying to every word a twinborn sigh ;  
 And last, pointing to Corinth, asked her sweet,  
 If 'twas too far that night for her soft feet.  
 The way was short, for Lamia's eagerness

344

Made, by a spell, the triple league decrease

To a few paces ; not at all surmised  
 By blinded Lycius, so in her comprised.  
 They passed the city gates, he knew not how,  
 So noiseless, and he never thought to know.

As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,      350  
 Throughout her palaces imperial,  
 And all her populous streets and temples lewd,  
 Muttered, like tempest in the distance brewed,  
 To the white-spreaded night above her towers.  
 Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours, 355  
 Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,  
 Companioned or alone ; while many a light  
 Flared, here and there, from wealthy festivals,  
 And threw their moving shadows on the walls,  
 Or found them clustered in the corniced shade  
 Of some arched temple door, or dusky colonnade.

Muffling his face, of greeting friends in fear,  
 Her fingers he pressed hard, as one came near  
 With curled grey beard, sharp eyes, and smooth  
 bald crown,  
 Slow-stepped, and robed in philosophic gown : 365  
 Lycius shrank closer, as they met and passed,  
 Into his mantle, adding wings to haste,  
 While hurried Lamia trembled : " Ah," said he,  
 " Why do you shudder, love, so ruefully ?  
 Why does your tender palm dissolve in dew ? "  
 " I'm wearied," said fair Lamia ; " tell me  
 who

371

Is that old man ? I cannot bring to mind  
His features :—Lycius ! wherefore did you blind  
Yourself from his quick eyes ? ” Lycius replied,  
“ ‘Tis Apollonius sage, my trusty guide      375  
And good instructor ; but to-night he seems  
The ghost of folly haunting my sweet dreams.”

While yet he spake they had arrived before  
A pillared porch, with lofty portal door,  
Where hung a silver lamp, whose phosphor  
glow 380  
Reflected in the slabbed steps below,  
Mild as a star in water ; for so new,  
And so unsullied was the marble's hue,  
So through the crystal polish, liquid fine,  
Ran the dark veins, that none but feet divine  
Could e'er have touched there. Sounds Æolian  
Breathed from the hinges, as the ample span  
*Of the wide doors disclosed a place unknown*  
Some time to any, but those two alone,  
And a few Persian mutes, who that same year 390  
Were seen about the markets : none knew where  
They could inhabit ; the most curious  
Were foiled, who watched to trace them to their  
house :

And but the flutter-winged verse must tell,  
For truth's sake, what woe afterwards besell, 395  
'Twould humour many a heart to leave them thus,  
Shut from the busy world of more incredulous.

PART II

- LOVE in a hut, with water and a crust,  
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust;  
Love in a palace is perhaps at last 400  
More grievous torment than a hermit's fast:—  
That is a doubtful tale from faery land,  
Hard for the non-elect to understand.  
Had Lycius lived to hand his story down,  
He might have given the moral a fresh frown,  
Or clenched it quite: but too short was their  
bliss 406
- To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft  
voice hiss.
- Besides, there, nightly, with terrific glare,  
Love, jealous grown of so complete a pair,  
Hovered and buzzed his wings, with fearful roar,  
Above the lintel of their chamber door, 411  
And down the passage cast a glow upon the floor.

For all this came a ruin: side by side  
They were enthroned, in the even-tide,  
Upon a couch, near to a curtaining 415  
Whose airy texture, from a golden string,  
Floated into the room, and let appear  
Unveiled the summer heaven, blue and clear,  
Betwixt two marble shafts:—there they repos'd,  
Where use had made it sweet, with eyelids  
closed, 420

Saving a tithe which love still open kept,  
 That they might see each other while they  
     almost slept ;

When from the slope side of a suburb hill,  
 Deafening the swallow's twitter, came a thrill  
 Of trumpets—Lycius started—the sounds fled,  
 But left a thought, a buzzing in his head.     426

For the first time, since first he harboured in  
 That purple-lined palace of sweet sin,  
 His spirit passed beyond its golden bourn  
 Into the noisy world almost forsworn.         430

The lady, ever watchful, penetrant,  
 Saw this with pain, so arguing a want  
 Of something more, more than her empery  
 Of joys ; and she began to moan and sigh  
 Because he mused beyond her, knowing well     435  
 That but a moment's thought is passion's passing  
     bell.

" Why do you sigh, fair creature ? " whispered  
     he :

" Why do you think ? " returned she tenderly :  
 " You have deserted me ;—where am I now ?  
 Not in your heart while care weighs on your  
     brow :   440

No, no, you have dismissed me ; and I go  
 From your breast houseless : aye, it must be  
     so."

He answered, bending to her open eyes,  
 Where he was mirror'd small in paradise :

" My silver planet, both of eve and morn !      445  
 Why will you plead yourself so sad forlorn,  
 While I am striving how to fill my heart  
 With deeper crimson, and a double smart ?  
 How to entangle, trammel up and snare  
 Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there      450  
 Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose ?  
 Aye, a sweet kiss—you see your mighty woes.  
 My thoughts ! shall I unveil them ? Listen,  
 then !

What mortal hath a prize, that other men  
 May be confounded and abashed withal,      455  
 But lets it sometimes pace abroad majestical,  
 And triumph, as in thee I should rejoice  
 Amid the hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice.  
 Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar,  
 While through the thronged streets your bridal  
 car      460  
 Wheels round its dazzling spokes."—The lady's  
 check

Trembled ; she nothing said, but, pale and meek,  
 Arose and knelt before him, wept a rain  
 Of sorrows at his words ; at last with pain  
 Beseeching him, the while his hand she wrung,      465  
 To change his purpose. He thereat was stung,  
 Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim  
 Her wild and timid nature to his aim :  
 Besides, for all his love, in self-despite,  
 Against his better self, he took delight      470

Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.  
 His passion, cruel grown, took on a hue  
 Fierce and sanguineous as 'twas possible  
 In one whose brow had no dark veins to swell.

Fine was the mitigated fury, like 475

Apollo's presence when in act to strike  
 The serpent—Ha, the serpent ! certes, she  
 Was none. She burnt, she loved the tyranny,  
 And, all subdued, consented to the hour  
 When to the bridal he should lead his paramour.  
 Whispering in midnight silence, said the youth,  
 " Sure some sweet name thou hast, though, by  
 my truth,

I have not asked it, ever thinking thee  
 Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny,  
 As still I do. Hast any mortal name, 485  
 Fit appellation for this dazzling frame ?

Or friends or kinsfolk on the citied earth,  
 To share our marriage feast and nuptial mirth ? ”  
 “ I have no friends,” said Lamia, “ no, not one ;  
 My presence in wide Corinth hardly known : 496  
 My parents' bones are in their dusty urns  
 Sepulchred, where no kindled incense burns,  
 Seeing all their luckless race are dead, save me,  
 And I neglect the holy rite for thee.

Even as you list invite your many guests ; 495  
 But if, as now it seems, your vision rests  
 With any pleasure on me, do not bid  
 Old Apollonius—from him keep me hid.”

Lycius, perplexed at words so blind and blank,  
 Made close inquiry; from whose touch she  
 shrank,

500

Feigning a sleep; and he to the dull shade  
 Of deep sleep in a moment was betrayed.

It was the custom then to bring away  
 The bride from home at blushing shut of day,  
 Veiled, in a chariot, heralded along        505  
 By strewn flowers, torches, and a marriage  
 song,

With other pageants: but this fair unknown  
 Had not a friend. So being left alone  
 (Lycius was gone to summon all his kin),  
 And knowing surely she could never win        510  
 His foolish heart from its mad pompousness,  
 She set herself, high-thoughted, how to dress  
*The misery in fit magnificence.*

She did so, but 'tis doubtful how and whence  
 Came, and who were her subtle servitors.        515  
 About the halls, and to and from the doors,  
 There was a noise of wings, till in short space  
 The glowing banquet-room shone with wide-  
 arched grace.

A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone  
 Supportress of the faery roof, made moan        520  
 Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might  
 fade.

Fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade

Of palm and plantain, met from either side,  
 High in the midst, in honour of the bride :  
 Two palms and then two plantains, and so on,  
 From either side their stems branched one to  
 one

526

All down the aisled place ; and beneath all  
 There ran a stream of lamps straight on from wall  
 to wall.

So canopied, lay an untasted feast  
 Teeming with odours. Lamia, regal drest, 530  
 Silently paced about, and as she went,  
 In pale contented sort of discontent,  
 Missioned her viewless servants to enrich  
 The fretted splendour of each nook and niche.  
 Between the tree-stems, marbled plain at first,  
 Came jasper pannels ; then, anon, there burst  
 Forth creeping imagery of slighter trees, 537  
 And with the larger wove in small intricacies.  
 Approving all, she faded at self-will,  
 And shut the chamber up, close, hushed and  
 still,

540

Complete and ready for the revels rude,  
 When dreadful guests would come to spoil her  
 solitude.

The day appeared, and all the gossip rout.  
 O senseless Lycius ! Madman ! wherefore flout  
 The silent-blessing fate, warm cloistered hours,  
 And show to common eyes these secret bowers ?

JOHN KEATS, 1795-1821

The herd approached ; each guest, with busy  
brain.

Arriving at the portal, gazed amain,  
And entered marvelling ; for they knew the  
street,

Remembered it from childhood all complete 550  
Without a gap, yet ne'er before had seen  
That royal porch, that high-built fair demesne ;  
So in they hurried all, mazed, curious and keen :  
Save one, who looked thereon with eye severe.  
And with calm-planted steps walked in austere ;  
'Twas Apollonius : something too he laughed, 556  
As though some knotty problem, that had dast  
His patient thought, had now begun to thaw.  
And solve and melt :—'twas just as he foresaw.

He met within the murmurous vestibule 560  
His young disciple. " 'Tis no common rule,  
Lycius," said he, " for uninvited guest  
To force himself upon you, and infest  
With an unbidden presence the bright throng  
Of younger friends ; yet must I do this wrong, 565  
And you forgive me." Lycius blushed, and led  
The old man through the inner doors broad-spread ;  
With reconciling words and courteous mien  
Turning into sweet milk the sophist's spleen.

Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room, 570  
Filled with pervading brilliance and perfume :

Before each lucid pannel fuming stood  
 A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,  
 Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,  
 Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft  
 Wool-woofed carpets : fifty wreaths of smoke 576  
 From fifty censers their light voyage took  
 To the high roof, still mimicked as they rose  
 Along the mirrored walls by twin-clouds odorous.  
 Twelve sphered tables, by silk seats insphered,  
 High as the level of a man's breast reared 581  
 On libbard's paws, upheld the heavy gold  
 Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told  
 Of Ceres' horn, and, in huge vessels, wine  
 Come from the gloomy tun with merry shine. 585  
 Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood,  
 Each shrining in the midst the image of a God.

When in an ante-chamber every guest  
*Had felt the cold full sponge to pleasure pressed,*  
 By minist'ring slaves, upon his hands and feet,  
 And fragrant oils with ceremony meet 591  
*Poured on his hair, they all moved to the feast*  
 In white robes, and themselves in order placed  
 Around the silken couches, wondering  
 Whence all this mighty cost and blaze of wealth  
 could spring. 595

Soft went the music the soft air along,  
 While fluent Greek a vowelled undersong  
 Kept up among the guests, discoursing low  
 At first, for scarcely was the wine at flow ;

But when the happy vintage touched their  
brains, 600

Louder they talk, and louder come the strains  
Of powerful instruments :—the gorgeous dyes,  
The space, the splendour of the draperies,  
The roof of awful richness, nectarous cheer,  
Beautiful slaves, and Lamia's self, appear, 605  
Now, when the wine has done its rosy deed,  
And every soul from human trammels freed,  
No more so strange ; for merry wine, sweet wine,  
Will make Elysian shades not too fair, too divine.  
Soon was God Bacchus at meridian height ; 610  
Flushed were their cheeks, and bright eyes  
double bright :

Garlands of every green, and every scent  
From vales deflowered, or forest-trees branch-  
rent,

In baskets of bright osiered gold were brought  
High as the handles heaped, to suit the thought  
Of every guest ; that each, as he did please, 616  
Might fancy-fit his brows, silk-pillowed at his ease.

What wreath for Lamia ? What for Lycius ?  
What for the sage, old Apollonius ?

Upon her aching forehead be there hung 620  
The leaves of willow and of adder's tongue ;  
And for the youth, quick, let us strip for him  
The thyrsus, that his watching eyes may swim  
Into forgetfulness ; and, for the sage,  
Let spear-grass and the spiteful thistle wage 625  
152

War on his temples. Do not all charms fly  
 At the mere touch of cold philosophy ?  
 There was an awful rainbow once in heaven :  
 We know her woof, her texture ; she is given  
 In the dull catalogue of common things.      630  
 Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
 Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
 Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—  
 Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
 The tender-personed Lamia melt into a shade.

By her glad Lycius sitting, in chief place, 636  
 Scarce saw in all the room another face,  
 Till, checking his love trance, a cup he took  
 Full brimmed, and opposite sent forth a look  
 'Cross the broad table, to beseech a glance 640  
 From his old teacher's wrinkled countenance,  
 And pledge him. The bald-head philosopher  
 Had fixed his eye, without a twinkle or stir  
 Full on the alarmed beauty of the bride,  
 Brow-beating her fair form, and troubling her  
 sweet pride.      645  
 Lycius then pressed her hand, with devout touch,  
 As pale it lay upon the rosy couch :  
 "Twas icy, and the cold ran through his veins ;  
 Then sudden it grew hot, and all the pains  
 Of an unnatural heat shot to his heart.      650  
 "Lamia, what means this ? Wherefore dost  
 thou start ?

JOHN KEATS, 1795-1821

Know'st thou that man?" Poor Lamia answered not.

He gazed into her eyes, and not a jot  
Owned they the love-dorn piteous appeal :  
More, more he gazed : his human senses reel : 655  
Some hungry spell that loveliness absorbs ;  
There was no recognition in those orbs.

" Lamia ! " he cried—and no soft-toned reply.  
The many heard, and the loud revelry  
Grew hush ; the stately music no more breathes ;  
The myrtle sickened in a thousand wreaths. 661  
By faint degrees, voice, lute, and pleasure  
ceased ;

A deadly silence step by step increased.  
Until it seemed a horrid presence there,  
And not a man but felt the terror in his hair. 665  
" Lamia ! " he shrieked ; and nothing but the  
shriek

With its sad echo did the silence break.

" Begone, foul dream ! " he cried, gazing again  
In the bride's face, where now no azure vein  
Wandered on fair-spaced temples ; no soft  
bloom 670

Misted the cheek ; no passion to illumine  
The deep-recessed vision :—all was blight ;  
Lamia, no longer fair, there sat a deadly white.  
" Shut, shut those juggling eyes, thou ruthless  
man !

Turn them aside, wretch ! or the righteous bar

Of all the Gods, whose dreadful images 676  
Here represent their shadowy presences,  
May pierce them on the sudden with the thorn  
Of painful blindness ; leaving thee forlorn,  
In trembling dotage to the feeblest fright 680  
Of conscience, for their long offended might,  
For all thine impious proud-heart sophistries,  
Unlawful magic, and enticing lies.  
Corinthians ! look upon that grey-beard wretch !  
Mark how, possessed, his lashless eyelids stretch  
Around his demon eyes ! Corinthians, see ! 686  
My sweet bride withers at their potency."  
" Fool ! " said the sophist, in an under-tone  
Gruff with contempt ; which a death-nighing  
moan  
From Lycius answered, as heart-struck and  
lost, 690  
He sat supine beside the aching ghost.  
" Fool ! Fool ! " repeated he, while his eyes still  
Relented not, nor moved ; " from every ill  
Of life have I preserved thee to this day,  
And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey ? " 695  
Then Lamia breathed death breath ; the  
sophist's eye,  
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,  
Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging : she, as well  
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,  
Motioned him to be silent ; vainly so, 700  
He looked and looked again a level—No !

"A serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said,  
 Than with a frightful scream she vanished:  
 And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,  
 As were his limbs of life, from that same night.  
 On the high couch he lay!—his friends came  
 round—

706

Supported him—no pulse, or breath they found,  
 And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.

## HART-LEAP WELL

CHARLES LAMB tells, somewhere, how when Wordsworth visited him one day, he was charged sixpence extra by his landlady because "the elderly gentleman had taken such a quantity of sugar in his tea." That picture of Wordsworth, an elderly gentleman helping himself to undreamed of quantities of sugar, corresponds with most of our notions of him; and we are grateful that Lamb's humour can keep the portrait so kind and whimsical. For it is easy to admire and even appreciate Wordsworth from afar; but it is more difficult to love the man and his poetry. There is, in the vast volume of his verse, much that is dull and worse than dull. The new theory of the relation of verse and prose propounded in the famous Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* had a fatal power to drag him down to the sub-poetic levels of *We are Seven* and similar narratives. He was always on his guard against the wiles of language and

the temptations of romance. Even *The Ancient Mariner* offended him in being so far removed from the ordinary events of life. It is as if Wordsworth sometimes said to himself : "It is the business of poetry, and therefore my business as a poet, to be dull ; to beware of flights of imagination in theme or language." He had but little conscious idea of that mighty conception of Milton's concerning the poet who rises up "with his singing robes about him." Yet, almost as by a miracle, he himself did rise up (from the dust of his theory and creed) to some of the greatest heights our poetry has attained. For Wordsworth, though his eternal efforts after simplicity of language often led him into doggerel, had the true inward eye of the poet. When the spirit was upon him his poetry transcended the deliberate of the reformer, and cast off the trammels of the theorist. It was at such times that he became what he has often been called—"the High Priest of Nature"; not merely the poet of her beauty, but also the interpreter of her inner secrets. Such familiar lyrics as *The Daffodils*, *To the Skylark*, and *The Rainbow* reflect his joy in her everyday moods that he strove to keep unspoiled for life. Sometimes, even in a lyric, he triumphs with a more intimate interpretation :

"The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her; and she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face."

The thought here is mystic, like all Wordsworth's deepest thought of Nature: the theme is the "oneness" of Nature and Man and God. And that same thought is developed in its varying forms through poem after poem, both lyric and narrative. The poem printed here—*Hart-leap Well*—is a typical example of the narrative interpretation. Its language and style, though dignified and beautiful beyond most of Wordsworth's narrative verse, never touch the heights of the stanza already quoted. But the theme is thoroughly representative of the poet. Sir Walter, the villain of the piece, breaks the mystic connection of Man and Nature by the hunting and killing of the hart. Nature is outraged, and a curse falls upon the well where the hart panted out its breath. To Wordsworth the interpreter of the story is a Shepherd—one of the simple folk who, with children, in Wordsworth's philosophy dwelt nearest to Nature and therefore nearest to God. The "moral" is no mere protest against hunting and slaughter; it is a deep imaginative plea for the preservation of a bond that binds all things together. It is interesting to remember that *Hart-leap Well* and *The Ancient Mariner*—far apart in every other way—have a common theme. The stanza which Wordsworth himself inspired in Coleridge's poem—

"He prayeth best who loveth best  
 All things both great and small;  
 For the dear God who loveth us,  
 He made and loveth all,"

may fitly stand beside the final couplet of his own poem :

*"Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."*



The Knight had ridden down from Wensley Moor  
With the slow motion of a summer's cloud,  
And now, as he approached a vassal's door,  
"Bring forth another horse!" he cried aloud.

"Another horse!"—That shout the vassal heard  
And saddled his best steed, a comely grey ;      6  
Sir Walter mounted him ; he was the third  
Which he had mounted on that glorious day.

Joy sparkled in the prancing courser's eyes ;  
The horse and horseman are a happy pair ;      10  
But, though Sir Walter like a falcon flies,  
There is a doleful silence in the air.

A rout this morning left Sir Walter's hall,  
That as they galloped made the echoes roar ;  
But horse and man are vanished, one and all ;  
Such race, I think, was never seen before.      16

Sir Walter, restless as a veering wind,  
Calls to the few tired dogs that yet remain :  
Blanch, Swift, and Music, noblest of their kind,  
Follow, and up the weary mountain strain.

The Knight hallooed, he cheered and chid them  
on,

With suppliant gestures and upbraiding stern ;  
But breath and eyesight fail ; and, one by one,  
The dogs are stretched among the mountain fern.

Where is the throng, the tumult of the race ? 25  
The bugles that so joyfully were blown ?  
—*This chase it looks not like an earthly chase ;*  
Sir Walter and the hart are left alone.

The poor hart toils along the mountain-side ;  
I will not stop to tell how far he fled, 30  
Nor will I mention by what death he died ;  
But now the Knight beholds him lying dead.

Dismounting, then, he leaned against a thorn ;  
He had no follower, dog, nor man, nor boy :  
He neither cracked his whip, nor blew his horn, 35  
But gazed upon the spoil with silent joy.

Close to the thorn on which Sir Walter leaned  
Stood his dumb partner in this glorious feat ;  
Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeaned ;  
And white with foam as if with cleaving sleet. 40

Upon his side the hart was lying stretched :  
His nostril touched a spring beneath a hill,  
And with the last deep groan his breath had  
fetched

The waters of the spring were trembling still.  
160

And now, too happy for repose or rest,        45  
 (Never had living man such joyful lot !)

Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and  
 west

And gazed and gazed upon that darling spot.

And climbing up the hill—(it was at least  
 Four rods of sheer ascent) Sir Walter found 50  
 Three several hoof-marks which the hunted beast  
 Had left imprinted on the grassy ground.

Sir Walter wiped his face, and cried, “Till now  
 Such sight was never seen by human eyes :  
 Three leaps have borne him from this lofty brow  
 Down to the very fountain where he lies.        56

“ I’ll build a pleasure-house upon this spot,  
 And a small arbour, made for rural joy ;  
 ’Twill be the traveller’s shed, the pilgrim’s cot,  
 A place of love for damsels that are coy.        60

“ A cunning artist will I have to frame  
 A basin for that fountain in the dell !  
 And they who do make mention of the same,  
 From this day forth, shall call it HART-LEAP  
 WELL.

“ And, gallant stag ! to make thy praises known,  
 Another monument shall here be raised ;        66  
 Three several pillars, each a rough-hewn stone,  
 And planted where thy hoofs the turf have grazed.

" And in the summer-time, when days are long,  
 I will come hither with my paramour ;      70  
 And with the dancers and the minstrel's song  
 We will make merry in that pleasant bower.

" Till the foundations of the mountains fail  
 My mansion with its arbour shall endure ;—  
 The joy of them who till the fields of Swale, 75  
 And them who dwell among the woods of Ure ! "

Then home he went, and left the hart stone-dead,  
 With breathless nostrils stretched above the  
 spring.

—Soon did the Knight perform what he had said ;  
 And far and wide the fame thereof did ring. 80

Ere thrice the moon into her port had steered,  
 A cup of stone received the living well ;  
 Three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter reared,  
 And built a house of pleasure in the dell.

And, near the fountain, flowers of stature tall 85  
 With trailing plants and trees were intertwined,—  
 Which soon composed a little sylvan hall,  
 A leafy shelter from the sun and wind.

And thither, when the summer days were long,  
 Sir Walter led his wondering paramour ;      90  
 And with the dancers and the minstrel's song  
 Made merriment within that pleasant bower.

The Knight, Sir Walter, died in course of time,  
 And his bones lie in his paternal vale.—  
 But there is matter for a second rhyme,      95  
 And I to this would add another tale.

## PART SECOND

The moving accident is not my trade ;  
 To freeze the blood I have no ready arts :  
 'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,  
 To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.    100

As I from Hawes to Richmond did repair,  
 It chanced that I saw standing in a dell  
 Three aspens at three corners of a square ;  
 And one, not four yards distant, near a well.

What this imported I could ill divine :      105  
 And, pulling now the rein my horse to stop,  
 I saw three pillars standing in a line,—  
 The last stone-pillar on a dark hill-top.

The trees were grey, with neither arms nor head ;  
 Half wasted the square mound of tawny green ;  
 So that you just might say, as then I said,    111  
 "Here in old time the hand of man hath been."

I looked upon the hill both far and near,  
 More doleful place did never eye survey ;    114  
 It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,  
 And Nature here were willing to decay.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, 1770-1850

I stood in various thoughts and fancies lost,  
When one, who was in shepherd's garb attired,  
Came up the hollow :—him did I accost,  
And what this place might be I then inquired. 120

The Shepherd stopped, and that same story told  
Which in my former rhyme I have rehearsed.  
“ A jolly place,” said he, “ in times of old !  
But something ails it now : the spot is curst.

“ You see these lifeless stumps of aspen wood—  
Some say that they are beeches, others elms— 126  
These were the bower ; and here a mansion  
stood,  
The finest palace of a hundred realms !

“ The arbour does its own condition tell ;  
You see the stones, the fountain, and the stream ;  
But as to the great Lodge ! you might as well 131  
Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.

“ There's neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep,  
Will wet his lips within that cup of stone ;  
And oftentimes, when all are fast asleep, 135  
This water doth send forth a dolorous groan.

“ Some say that here a murder has been done,  
And blood cries out for blood : but, for my part,  
I've guessed, when I've been sitting in the sun,  
That it was all for that unhappy hart. 140  
164

## HART-LEAP WELL

" What thoughts must through the creature's  
brain have past !

Even from the topmost stone, upon the steep,  
Are but three bounds—and look, Sir, at this last—  
O Master ! it has been a cruel leap.

" For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race ; 145  
And in my simple mind we cannot tell  
What cause the hart might have to love this  
place,  
And come and make his death-bed near the well.

" Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank,  
Lulled by the fountain in the summer-tide ; 150  
This water was perhaps the first he drank  
When he had wandered from his mother's side.

" In April here, beneath the flowering thorn,  
He heard the birds their morning carols sing ;  
And he perhaps, for aught we know, was born 155  
Not half a furlong from that self-same spring.

" Now, here is neither grass nor pleasant shade ;  
The sun on drearier hollow never shone ;  
So will it be, as I have often said,  
Till trees, and stones, and fountain, all 150  
gone."

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, 1770-1850

" Grey-headed shepherd, thou hast spoken well ;  
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine :  
This beast not unobserved by Nature fell ;  
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

" The Being that is in the clouds and air, 165  
That is in the green leaves among the groves,  
Maintains a deep and reverential care  
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

" The pleasure-house is dust :—behind, before,  
This is no common waste, no common gloom ;  
But Nature, in due course of time, once more 171  
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

" She leaves these objects to a slow decay,  
That what we are, and have been, may be  
known ;  
But at the coming of the milder day 175  
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

" One lesson, shepherd, let us two divide,  
" Taught both by what she shows, and what  
conceals ;  
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
With sorrow of the meanest thing that  
feels." 180

## THE DEAD MAID OF ASTOLAT

### THE DEAD MAID OF ASTOLAT

"**N**OW speke we," writes Malory, "of the faire mayden of Astolat, that made such sorowe daye and night that she never slepte, etc, nor drank, and ever she made complaynt unto sir Launcelot." Tennyson could never catch, four hundred years afterwards, the charm of that old book. In its quaint spelling, which we would not miss now, and its strange, formless sentences, lay all the wonder of a tale treasured in the long memory of men and women. It has been argued against Tennyson that he spoilt the lofty yet sad romance of an epic-legend with the sweetness of his "drawing-room verse"; and that for King Arthur, the mighty hero of a mighty tradition, he substituted the Prince Consort of England. In brief, Tennyson's Arthurian tales have been attacked on the one hand for that peculiar music with which he, more perhaps than any other poet, could endow the words and rhythm of his verse; and on the other for what is now often condemned as Victorian smugness and morality. There is foundation for both charges; but both have been emphasised by some modern writers, who, having little skill themselves in verse, despise it heartily in others. To blame Tennyson for not reproducing Malory is manifestly absurd; as far as we know, he did not try to. He went to Malory's book as to a treasure house, but sought to make his own beautiful creations from the treasure he found there. True, he could not catch the spirit of *Le Morte Arthur* as William Morris was wont to catch the spirit of Chaucer.

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, 1809-1892

But he balanced his losses by gains. Often enough the amorphous wordiness of Malory—beautiful only by its quaintness—becomes in Tennyson a sudden felicity of thought and phrase.

For Launcelot's tiresome apologies at Elaine's death he gives us a moving narrative of grief :

“*But Launcelot mused a little space ;  
He said ‘She has a lovely face ;  
God in His mercy lend her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott.’”*

A hint in Malory—"They sond the fayrest corps lyenge in a ryche bedde, and a poure man sittynge in the bargets ende"—he will transform into a picture :

“*Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead  
Steer'd by the dumb went upward in the flood—  
In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter — all her bright hair streaming  
down. . . .”*

The two poems abound in lines that are none the less beautiful because they are of Tennyson and not of Malory. It is a good thing to read them with Malory's narrative; and then to compare the one with the other as examples of Tennyson's own art; remembering that *Elaine* dates over twenty-five years after *The Lady of Shalott*.



Then spake the lily maid of Astolat :  
“Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I  
For anger : these are slanders : never yet  
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.  
He makes no friend who never made a foe.”      5

## THE DEAD MAID OF ASTOLAT

But now it is my glory to have loved  
One peerless, without stain : so let me pass,  
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,  
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best  
And greatest, tho' my love had no return : 10  
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,  
Thanks, but you work against your own desire ;  
For if I could believe the things you say  
I should but die the sooner ; wherefore cease,  
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man <sup>1</sup> 15  
Hither, and let me shrieve me clean, and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,  
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,  
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised  
A letter, word for word ; and when he ask'd 20  
" Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord ?  
Then will I bear it gladly ; " she replied,  
" For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,  
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote  
The letter she devised ; which being writ 25  
And folded, " O sweet father, tender and true,  
Deny me not," she said— " you never yet  
Denied my fancies—this, however strange,  
My latest : lay the letter in my hand  
A little ere I die, and close the hand 30.  
Upon it ; I shall guard it even in death.  
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,

<sup>1</sup> *ghostly man* : confessor.

Then take the little bed on which I died  
 For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's  
 For richness, and me also like the Queen      35  
 In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.  
 And let there be prepared a chariot-bier  
 To take me to the river, and a barge  
 Be ready on the river, clothed in black.  
 I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.      40  
 There surely I shall speak for mine own self,  
 And none of you can speak for me so well.  
 And therefore let our dumb old man alone  
 Go with me, he can steer and row, and he  
 Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."      45

She ceased : her father promised ; whereupon  
 She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death  
 Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.  
 But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
 Her father laid the letter in her hand,      50  
 And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
 So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from under-  
 ground,  
 Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows  
 Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier      55  
 Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone  
 Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,  
 Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.

## THE DEAD MAID OF ASTOLAT

There sat the lifelong creature of the house,  
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,         60  
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.  
So those two brethren from the chariot took  
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,  
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung  
The silken case with braided blazonings,         65,  
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her  
“ Sister, farewell for ever,” and again  
“ Farewell, sweet sister,” parted all in tears.  
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead  
Steer'd by the dumb went upward with the  
flood—   70

In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—  
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
All but her face, and that clear-featured face   75  
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead  
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last  
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,         80  
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
With deaths of others, and almost his own,  
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds : for he saw  
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen   84  
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, 1809-1892

With such and so unmoved a majesty  
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,  
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet  
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
The shadow of a piece of pointed lace,      90  
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,  
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,  
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,  
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd,  
"Queen,      95

Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
Take, what I had not won except for you,  
These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,  
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's    100  
Is tawnier than her cygnet's : these are words :  
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin  
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it  
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words  
Perchance, we both can pardon : but, my Queen,    105  
I hear of rumours flying thro' your court.  
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
Should have in it an absoluter trust  
To make up that defect : let rumours be :  
When did not rumours fly ? these, as I trust    110  
That you trust me in your own nobleness,  
I may not well believe that you believe."

## THE DEAD MAID OF ASTOLAT

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen  
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine  
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off, 115  
Till all the place whereon she stood was green ;  
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand  
Received at once and laid aside the gems  
There on a table near her, and replied :

“ It may be, I am quicker of belief 120  
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.  
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.  
This good is in it, whatsoc’er of ill,  
It can be broken easier. I for you  
This many a year have done despite and wrong  
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts 126  
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these ?  
Diamonds for me ! they had been thrice their  
worth  
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.  
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts 130  
Must vary as the giver’s. Not for me !  
For her ! for your new fancy. Only this  
Grant me, I pray you : have your joys apart.  
I doubt not that however changed, you keep  
So much of what is graceful : and myself 135  
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy  
In which as Arthur’s queen I move and rule :  
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this !  
A strange one ! yet I take it with Amen.

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, 1809-1892

So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls ;  
Deck her with these ; tell her, she shines me  
down : 141

An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's  
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck  
O as much fairer—as a faith once fair  
Was richer than these diamonds—hers not mine—  
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself, 146  
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—  
She shall not have them.”

Saying which she seized,  
And, thro' the easement standing wide for heat,  
Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote  
the stream. 150

Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,  
*Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.*

Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disgust  
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
Close underneath his eyes, and right across 155  
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge  
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat  
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away  
To weep and wail in secret ; and the barge, 160  
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.  
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door ; to  
whom,  
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,  
174

## THE DEAD MAID OF ASTOLAT

Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that  
ask'd

" What is it ? " but that oarsman's haggard face,  
As hard and still as is the face that men      166  
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks  
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,  
" He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,  
Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair !  
Yea, but how pale ! what are they ? flesh and  
blood ?    171

Or come to take the King to fairy land ?  
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,  
But that he passes into fairy land."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King  
Came girt with knights : then turn'd the tongue-  
less man    176

From the half-face to the full eye, and rose  
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.  
So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale  
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid ;      180  
And reverently they bore her into hall.  
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,  
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,  
And last the Queen herself and pitied her :  
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,      185  
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it ; this was all.

" Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, 1809-1892

Come, for you left me taking no farewell,  
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.      190  
I loved you, and my love had no return,  
And therefore my true love has been my death.  
And therefore to our lady Guinevere,  
And to all other ladies, I make moan.  
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.      195  
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,  
As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read,  
And ever in the reading, lords and dames  
Wept, looking often from his face who read  
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,      200  
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

From *Elaine*

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

PART I

On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye,  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky ;  
And thro' the field the road runs by

To many-tower'd Camelot ;      5  
And up and down the people go,  
Gazing where the lilies blow  
Round an island there below,

The island of Shalott.

## THE LADY OF SHALOTT

Willows, whiten, aspens quiver, 10  
Little breezes dusk and shiver  
Thro' the wave that runs for ever  
By the island in the river

Flowing down to Camelot.

Four grey walls, and four grey towers, 15  
Overlook a space of flowers,  
And the silent isle embowers

The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,  
Slide the heavy barges trail'd 20  
By slow horses ; and unhail'd  
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd

Skimming down to Camelot :

But who hath seen her wave her hand ?  
Or at the casement seen her stand ? 25  
Or is she known in all the land,  
The Lady of Shalott ?

Only reapers, reaping early  
In among the bearded barley,  
Hear a song that echoes cheerly 30  
From the river winding clearly,

Down to tower'd Camelot :

And by the moon the reaper weary,  
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,  
Listening, whispers, " 'Tis the fairy 35  
Lady of Shalott."

PART II

There she weaves by night and day  
A magic web with colours gay.  
She has heard a whisper say,  
A curse is on her if she stay  
                        To look down to Camelot.

She knows not what the curse may be,  
And so she weaveth steadily,  
And little other care hath she,

The Lady of Shalott. 4

And moving thro' a mirror clear  
That hangs before her all the year,  
Shadows of the world appear.

There she sees the highway near  
                        Winding down to Camelot : 5'

There the river eddy whirls,  
And there the surly village-churls,  
And the red cloaks of market girls

Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,  
An abbot on an ambling pad,  
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,  
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,

                        Goes by to tower'd Camelot ;

And sometimes thro' the mirror blue  
The knights come riding two and two :  
She hath no loyal knight and true,

                        The Lady of Shalott. 60

## THE LADY OF SHALOTT

But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror's magic sights, 65  
For often thro' the silent nights  
A funeral, with plumes and lights,  
And music, went to Camelot :  
Or when the moon was overhead,  
Came two young lovers lately wed ; 70  
" I am half sick of shadows," said  
The Lady of Shalott.

### PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,  
He rode between the barley-sheaves,  
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves, 75  
And flamed upon the brazen greaves  
Of bold Sir Lancelot.  
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd  
To a lady in his shield,  
That sparkled on the yellow field, 80  
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,  
Like to some branch of stars we see  
Hung in the golden Galaxy.  
The bridle bells rang merrily 85  
As he rode down to Camelot :  
And from his blazon'd baldric slung  
A mighty silver bugle hung,  
And as he rode his armour rung,  
Beside remote Shalott. 90  
179

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, 1809-1892

All in the blue unclouded weather  
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,  
The helmet and the helmet-feather  
Burn'd like one burning flame together,

As he rode down to Camelot.

95

As often thro' the purple night,  
Below the starry clusters bright,  
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,

Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd ;  
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode ;  
From underneath his helmet flow'd  
His coal-black curls as on he rode,

As he rode down to Camelot.

100

From the bank and from the river  
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,  
"Tirra lirra," by the river

Sang Sir Lancelot.

105

She left the web, she left the loom,  
She made three paces thro' the room.  
She saw the water-lily bloom,  
She saw the helmet and the plume,

She look'd down to Camelot.

110

Out flew the web and floated wide ;  
The mirror cracked from side to side ;  
"The curse is come upon me," cried

The Lady of Shalott.

115

# THE LADY OF SHALOTT

## PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,  
The pale yellow woods were waning,  
The broad stream in his banks complaining, 120  
Heavily the low sky raining

Over tower'd Camelot ;  
Down she came and found a boat  
Beneath a willow left afloat,  
And round about the prow she wrote 125  
*The Lady of Shalott.*

And down the river's dim expanse—  
Like some bold seer in a trance,  
Seeing all his own mischance—  
With a glassy countenance 130

Did she look to Camelot.

And at the closing of the day  
She loosed the chain, and down she lay ;  
The broad stream bore her far away,

*The Lady of Shalott.* 135

Lying, robed in snowy white  
That loosely flew to left and right—  
The leaves upon her falling light—  
Thro' the noises of the night

She floated down to Camelot : 140  
And as the boat-head wound along  
The willowy hills and fields among,  
They heard her singing her last song,

*The Lady of Shalott.*

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON, 1809-1892

Heard a carol, mournful, holy, 145  
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,  
Till her blood was frozen slowly,  
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,  
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot ;  
For ere she reach'd upon the tide 150  
The first house by the water-side,  
Singing in her song she died,  
*The Lady of Shalott.*

Under tower and balcony,  
By garden-wall and gallery, 155  
A gleaming shape she floated by,  
Dead-pale between the houses high,  
Silent into Camelot.  
Out upon the wharfs they came,  
Knight and burgher, lord and dame, 160  
And round the prow they read her name,  
*The Lady of Shalott.*

Who is this ? and what is here ?  
And in the lighted palace near  
Died the sound of royal cheer ; 165  
And they cross'd themselves for fear,  
All the knights at Camelot :  
But Lancelot mused a little space ;  
He said, " She has a lovely face ;  
God in his mercy lend her grace, 170  
*The Lady of Shalott."*

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

### THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

BROWNING once bemoaned the fact that Tennyson was ultra-careful over the language of his poems. "Tennyson reads the *Quarterly*," he said, "and does as they bid him with the most solemn face in the world; out goes this, in goes that. All is changed and ranged. Oh me!" But Tennyson had his revenge afterwards. When Browning sent his long poem *Sordello* to his fellow-poet and friend, Tennyson wrote that he could not understand a word of it except the first line, "Who will, may hear Sordello's story told," and the last line, "Who would, has heard Sordello's story told"; and these, he added, were both lies. Browning's obscurity has, indeed, always been a by-word; and even in a narrative poem like *The Flight of the Duchess* we cannot quite escape it. Yet we must remember that this very obscurity generally—though not always—arose out of Browning's poetic or artistic method. In lyric and narrative he visualised *dramatically* his own personal theme or the story he had to tell. He must have someone to speak to, or cause someone (as in this poem) to tell the tale with voice and gesture; so his style of poetry inevitably becomes conversational, with all the brokenness of spoken language—the question, the exclamation, the parenthetical aside, the personal digression. He rarely, if ever, told a story in the purely objective way; even *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* becomes personal at the end:

"So, Willy, let you and me be wipers  
Of scores out with all men, especially pipers."

This dramatic method is perfectly clear in *The Flight of the Duchess*, where the Huntsman, "the man the Duke spoke to," who "helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke," tells the story as spectator and actor, with the intimate appeal to a second person—"You're my friend." His first-hand narrative is the more vivid for its reminiscence—memories here and there of that redoubtable boar-sticking father of his, and sudden turns out of the past to the present :

"Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!"

—just as, in the greatest of all English narrative poems, the Mariner's story is flung into relief by the exclamations of the Wedding-guest.

The actual language of the poem is strange and vivid, too. We have already noted that, by the very form of the narrative, it is conversational ; but in this poem, as in most of his other work, Browning's style has a peculiar quality of its own. A great critic of his own time, Walter Bagehot, applied the term "grotesque" to his art. The words tumble out, the phrases hurry and scurry, and form themselves pell-mell into sentences. It is as if Browning were "talking" his thoughts quickly, energetically, running ahead of words. He has no time for the niceties of language, as Tennyson had ; quite often verse becomes metrical colloquialism. Perhaps most striking of all is his queer obsession with awkward and amazing rhymes, like this :

"Blesseder he who nobly sunk 'nhs'  
And 'ahs' while he tugged on his grandsire's  
trunk-hose."

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

This poem, like *The Pied Piper*, is full of them ; and they stand in strong contrast to the simplicity of his most familiar lyric, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*, or that tender poem of friendship, *May and Death*.

Yet into the turmoil of his narrative Browning was wont to toss passages of splendid beauty. They come suddenly, now and then :

*" When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,  
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice  
That covered the pond, till the sun in a trice,  
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold. . . ."*

And—

*" Life, that filling her, passed redundant,  
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,  
As her head thrown back showed the white throat  
curving,  
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,  
Moving to the mystic measure,  
Bounding as the bosom bounded."*

Most of his poetry has a rare gusto, a fine abandonment, foreign to the work of his contemporaries ; and often the gusto rises into the beautiful. In this poem, as in so much of what he wrote, there are revealed the quick temperament and the vital atmosphere of the Italy he loved—something brighter and more vivid than the grey homeliness of the England he nevertheless longed for “ now that April’s there.”

## I

You're my friend :  
 I was the man the Duke spoke to ;  
 I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too ;  
 So, here's the tale from beginning to end,  
 My friend !

5

## II

Ours is a great wild country :  
 If you climb to our castle's top,  
 I don't see where your eye can stop ;  
 For when you've passed the corn-field country,  
 Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed, 10  
 And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,  
 And cattle-tract to open-chase,  
 And open-chase to the very base  
 Of the mountain, where, at a funeral pace,  
 Round about, *solemn and slow*, 15  
 One by one, row after row,  
 Up and up the pine-trees go,  
 So, like black priests up, and so  
 Down the other side again  
 To another greater, wilder country, 20  
 That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,  
 Branched through and through with many a vein  
 Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt ;  
 Look right, look left, look straight before,—  
 Beneath they mine, above they smelt, 25  
 Copper-ore and iron-ore,  
 And forge and furnace mould and melt,

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

I so on, more and ever more,  
, at the last, for a bounding belt,  
nes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,  
nd the whole is our Duke's country !      31

### III

was born the day this present Duke was—  
nd O, says the song, ere I was old !)

the castle where the other Duke was—

When I was happy and young, not old !)      35

in the Kennel, he in the Bower :

'e are of like age to an hour.

y father was Huntsman in that day ;

Who has not heard my father say

hat, when a boar was brought to bay,      40

'three times, four times out of five,

With his huntspear he'd contrive

To get the killing-place transfix'd,

And pin him true, both eyes betwixt ?

And that's why the old Duke would rather      45

He lost a salt-pit than my father,

And loved to have him ever in call ;

That's why my father stood in the hall

When the old Duke brought his infant out

To show the people, and while they passed      50

The wondrous bantling round about,

Was first to start at the outside blast

As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn,

Just a month after the babe was born.

" And," quoth the Kaiser's courier, " since      55  
 The Duke has got an Heir, our Prince  
 Needs the Duke's self at his side : "  
 The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,  
 But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,  
 Castles a-fire, men on their march,      60  
 The toppling tower, the crashing arch ;  
 And up he looked, and awhile he eyed  
 The row of crests and shields and banners  
 Of all achievements after all manners,  
 And " ay," said the Duke with a surly pride. 65  
 The more was his comfort when he died  
 At next year's end, in a velvet suit,  
 With a gilt glove on his hand, and his foot  
 In a silken shoe for a leather boot,  
 Petticoated like a herald,      70  
 In a chamber next to an ante-room,  
 Where he breathed the breath of page and  
 groom,  
 What he called stink, and they, perfume :  
 —They should have set him on red Berold,  
 Mad with pride, like fire to manage !      75  
 They should have got his cheek fresh tannage  
 Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine !  
 Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin !  
 (Hark, the wind's on the heath at its game !  
 Oh for a noble falcon-banner      80  
 To flap each broad wing like a banner,  
 And turn in the wind, and dance like flame !)

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Had they broached a cask of white beer from  
Berlin !

—Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine  
Put to his lips when they saw him pine,      85  
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,  
Cotnar, for instance, green as May sorrel,  
And ropy with sweet,—we shall not quarrel.

### IV

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess  
Was left with the infant in her clutches,      90  
She being the daughter of God knows who :  
And now was the time to revisit her tribe.  
So, abroad and afar they went, the two,  
And let our people rail and gibe  
At the empty Hall and extinguished fire,      95  
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,  
Till after long years we had our desire,  
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

### V

And he came back the pertest little ape  
That ever affronted human shape ;      100  
Full of his travel, struck at himself.  
You'd say, he despised our bluff old ways ?  
—Not he ! For in Paris they told the elf      103  
That our rough North land was the Land of Lays,  
The one good thing left in evil days ;

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,  
And only in wild nooks like ours  
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,  
And see true castles, with proper towers,  
Young-hearted women, old-minded men,      110  
And manners now as manners were then.  
So, all that the old Dukes had been, without  
knowing it,  
This Duke would fain know he was, without  
being it ;  
'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his  
showing it,  
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our see-  
ing it,    115  
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,  
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of  
them torn-out :  
And chief in the chase his neck he perilled,  
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,  
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength ; 120  
—They should have set him on red Berold,  
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,  
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey spire !

VI

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard :  
And out of a convent, at the word,                    125  
Came the Lady, in time of spring.  
—Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling !  
190

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

That day, I know, with a dozen oaths  
I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes  
Fit for the chase of urox or buffle                    130  
In winter-time when you need to muffle.  
But the Duke had a mind we should cut  
    a figure,  
And so we saw the Lady arrive :  
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger !  
She was the smallest lady alive,                    135  
Made, in a piece of Nature's madness,  
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness  
That over-filled her, as some hive  
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees  
Is crowded with its safe merry bees :                140  
In truth, she was not hard to please !  
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the  
    mead,  
Straight at the castle, that's best indeed  
To look at from outside the walls :  
As for us, styled the " serfs and thralls,"        145  
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,  
(With her eyes, do you understand ?)  
Because I patted her horse while I led it ;  
And Max, who rode on her other hand,  
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired            150  
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—  
If that was an eagle she saw hover,  
And the green and grey bird on the field was the  
    plover.

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

When suddenly appeared the Duke :

And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed  
On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,      156  
And as if his backbone were not jointed,  
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,  
And welcomed her with his grandest smile ;  
And, mind you, his mother all the while      160  
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward ;  
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pulleys  
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis ;  
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,  
The Lady's face stopped its play,      165  
As if her first hair had grown grey—  
For such things must begin some one day !

VII

In a day or two she was well again ;  
As who should say, " You labour in vain !  
This is all a jest against God, who meant      170  
I should ever be, as I am, content  
And glad in His sight ; therefore, glad I will be ! "  
So, smiling as at first went she.

VIII

She was active, stirring, all fire—  
Could not rest, could not tire—      175  
To a stone she might have given life !  
(I myself loved once, in my day)  
—For a Shepherd's, Miner's, Huntsman's wife,  
(I had a wife, I know what I say)

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

- Never in all the world such an one ! 180  
And here was plenty to be done,  
And she that could do it, great or small,  
She was to do nothing at all.  
There was already this man in his post,  
'This in his station, and that in his office, 185  
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,  
To meet his eye, with the other trophies,  
Now outside the Hall, now in it,  
To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,  
At the proper place in the proper minute, 190  
And die away the life between.  
And it was amusing enough, each infraction  
Of rule (but for after-sadness that came)  
To hear the consummate self-satisfaction  
With which the young Duke and the old Dame  
Would let her advise, and criticise, 196  
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,  
And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame :  
They bore it all in complacent guise,  
As though an artificer, after contriving 200  
A wheel-work image as if it were living,  
Should find with delight it could motion to  
strike him !  
So found the Duke, and his mother like him :  
The Lady hardly got a rebuff—  
That had not been contemptuous enough, 205  
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,  
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

IX

So, the little Lady grew silent and thin,  
Paling and ever paling,  
As the way is with a hid chagrin ; 21

And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,  
And said in his heart, " 'Tis done to spite me,  
But I shall find in my power to right me ! "  
Don't swear, friend—the Old One, many a year,  
Is in Hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall  
hear. 215

X

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,  
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a  
morning,  
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice,  
That coverea' the pond' till' the sun, in a trice,  
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold, 220  
And another and another, and faster and faster,  
Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water tolled :  
Then it so chanced that the Duke our master  
Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,  
And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,  
He should do the Middle Age no treason 226  
In resolving on a hunting-party.  
Always provided, old books showed the way of  
it !

What meant old poets by their strictures ?  
And when old poets had said their say of it, 230  
How taught old painters in their pictures ?

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

We must revert to the proper channels,  
Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,  
And gather up Woodcraft's authentic traditions :  
Here was food for our various ambitions, 235  
As on each case, exactly stated,  
—To encourage your dog, now, the properest  
chirrup,

Or best prayer to St. Hubert on mounting your  
stirrup—.

We of the household took thought and debated.  
Blessed was he whose back ached with the  
jerkin

His sire was wont to do forest-work in ; 241  
Blesseder he who nobly sunk “ ohs ”  
And “ ahs ” while he tugged on his grandsire’s  
trunk-hose ;

What signified hats if they had no rims on,  
Each slouching before and behind like the  
scallop, 245

And able to serve at sea for a shallop,  
Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson ?  
So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme  
on’t,

What with our Venerers, Prickers, and  
Verderers,  
Might hope for real hunters at length, and not  
murderers, 250  
And oh, the Duke’s tailor—he had a hot time  
on’t !

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

If, when you decided to give her an airing,  
You found she needed a little preparing ?  
—I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,  
If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon ?  
Yet when the Duke to his lady signified, 280  
Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,  
In what a pleasure she was to participate,—  
And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,  
Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,  
As if pressed by fatigue even he could not  
dissipate, 285  
And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,  
But spoke of her health, if her health were worth  
aught,  
Of the weight by day and the watch by night,  
And much wrong now that used to be right,  
*So, thanking him, declined the hunting,—* 290  
Was conduct ever more affronting ?  
With all the ceremony settled—  
With the towel ready, and the sewer  
Polishing up his oldest ewer,  
And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald, 295  
Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-  
balled,—  
No wonder if the Duke was nettled !  
And when she persisted nevertheless,—  
Well, I suppose here's the time to confess 299  
That there ran half round our Lady's chamber  
A balcony none of the hardest to clamber ;

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in  
waiting,

Stayed in call outside, what need of relating ?

And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a  
fervent

Adorer of Jacynth, of course, was your servant ;  
And if she had the habit to peep through the  
casement, 306

How could I keep at any vast distance ?

And so, as I say, on the Lady's persistence,

The Duke, dumb-stricken with amazement,

Stood for a while in a sultry smother, 310

And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,

Turned her over to his yellow mother

To learn what was decorous and lawful ;

And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like  
instinct,

As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-  
tinct. 315

Oh, but the Lady heard the whole truth at once !

What meant she ?—Who was she ?—Her duty  
and station,

The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,  
Its decent regard and its fitting relation—

In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free  
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry, 321

And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,  
And then you may guess how that tongue of

hers ran on !

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

ll, somehow or other it ended at last  
d, licking her whiskers, out she passed ; 325  
d after her,—making (he hoped) a face  
se Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,  
alked the Duke's self with the austere grace  
ancient hero or modern paladin,  
om door to staircase—oh, such a solemn 330  
nbending of the vertebral column !

### XII

lowever, at sunrise our company mustered ;  
nd here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,  
nd there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,  
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel ;  
For the court-yard's four walls were filled with  
fog 336

You might cut as an axe chops a log,  
Like so much wool' for colour and' bulkiness ;  
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,  
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,  
And a sinking at the lower abdomen 341  
Begins the day with indifferent omen.  
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,  
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder  
This way and that from the valley under ; 345  
And, looking through the court-yard arch,  
Down in the valley, what should meet him  
But a troop of Gipsies on their march,  
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

## XIII

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only 35<sup>0</sup>  
 After reaching all lands beside ;  
 North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely,  
 And still, as they travel far and wide,  
 Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace  
 there,

That puts you in mind of a place here, a place  
 there. 35<sup>5</sup>

But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,  
 And nowhere else, I take it, are found  
 With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned ;  
 Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on  
 The very fruit they are meant to feed on. 36<sup>0</sup>  
 For the earth—not a use to which they don't  
 turn it,

The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,  
 Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,  
 They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it—  
 Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle  
 With side-bars never a brute can baffle ; 36<sup>6</sup>  
 Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards ;  
 Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve  
 inwards,

Horseshoes they'll hammer which turn on a swivel  
 And won't allow the hoof to shrivel. 37<sup>0</sup>  
 Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle,  
 That keep a stout heart in the ram with their  
 tinkle ;

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

But the sand—they pinch and pound it like  
otters ;

Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters !

Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear, 375

Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,

As if in pure water you dropped and let die

A bruised black-blooded mulberry ;

And that other sort, their crowning pride,

With long white threads distinct inside, 380

Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle

Loose such a length and never tangle,

Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,

And the cup-lily couches with all the white  
daughters :

Such are the works they put their hand to, 385

And the uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.

And these made the troop, which our Duke saw  
sally

Towards his castle from out of the valley,

Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,

Come out with the morning to greet our riders.

And up they wound till they reached the ditch,

Whereat all stopped save one, a witch

That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,

By her gait, directly, and her stoop,

I, whom Jacynth was used to importune 395

To let that same witch tell us our fortune.

The oldest Gipsy then above ground ;

And, so sure as the autumn season came round,

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,  
And every time, as she swore, for the last time.  
And presently she was seen to sidle . . . . . 401  
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,  
So that the horse of a sudden reared up  
As under its nose the old witch peered up  
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eyeholes 405  
Of no use now but to gather brine,  
And began a kind of level whine  
Such as they used to sing to their viols  
When their ditties they go grinding  
Up and down with nobody minding : . . . . . 410  
And, then as of old, at the end of the humming  
Her usual presents were forthcoming  
—A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,  
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine  
pebbles,) . . . . .  
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-  
end,— . . . . . 415  
And so she awaited her annual stipend.  
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe  
A word in reply ; and in vain she felt  
With twitching fingers at her belt  
For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt, . . . . . 420  
Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe,—  
Till, either to quicken his apprehension,  
Or possibly with an after-intention,  
She was come, she said, to pay her duty  
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty. . . . . 425

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

No sooner had she named his Lady,  
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,  
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—  
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning ;  
If one gave her a taste of what life was and  
sorrow,

430

She, foolish to-day, would be wiser to-morrow ;  
And who so fit a teacher of trouble  
As this sordid crone bent wellnigh double ?  
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,  
(If such it was, for they grow so hirsute      435  
That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)  
He was contrasting, 'twas plain from his gesture,  
The life of the Lady so flower-like and delicate  
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.

I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned    440  
From out of the throng, and while I drew near  
He told the crone, as I since have reckoned  
By the way he bent and spoke into her ear  
With circumspection and mystery,  
The main of the Lady's history,                  445  
Her frowardness and ingratitude ;  
And for all the crone's submissive attitude  
I could see round her mouth the loose plaits  
tightening,

And her brow with assenting intelligence  
brightening,  
As though she engaged with hearty goodwill    450  
Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

And promised the Lady a thorough frightening.  
And so, just giving her a glimpse  
Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps  
The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the fern-  
shaw,

455

He bade me take the Gipsy mother  
And set her telling some story or other  
Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,  
To while away a weary hour  
For the Lady left alone in her bower,

460

Whose mind and body craved exertion  
And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,  
Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo  
Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and  
servitor,

465

And back I turned and bade the crone follow.  
And what makes me confident what's to be told  
you

Had all along been of this crone's devising,  
Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,  
There was a novelty quick as surprising : 470  
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,  
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,  
As if age had foregone its usurpature,  
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,  
And the face looked quite of another nature, 475  
204

'Twixt the eyes where the life holds garrison,  
—Jacynth forgive me the comparison !

But where I begin my own narration

Is a little after I took my station

505

To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,

And, having in those days a falcon eye,

To follow the hunt thro' the open country,

From where the bushes thinlier crested

The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree. 510

When, in a moment, my ear was arrested

By—was it singing, or was it saying,

Or a strange musical instrument playing

In the chamber ?—and to be certain

I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,

515

And there lay Jacynth asleep,

Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,

In a rosy sleep along the floor

With her head against the door ;

While in the midst, on the seat of state,

520

Was a queen—the Gipsy woman late,

With head and face downbent

On the Lady's head and face intent :

For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,

The Lady sat between her knees

525

And o'er them the Lady's clasped hands met,

And on those hands her chin was set,

And her upturned face met the face of  
the crone

Wherein the eyes had grown and grown

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

- As if she could double and quadruple                    530  
At pleasure the play of either pupil  
—Very like, by her hands' slow fanning,  
As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers  
They moved to measure, or bell clappers.  
I said, is it blessing, is it banning,                    535  
Do they applaud you or burlesque you—  
Those hands and fingers with no flesh on ?  
But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,  
At once I was stopped by the Lady's  
expression :  
For it was life her eyes were drinking                    540  
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,  
—Life's pure fire received without shrinking,  
Into the heart and breast whose heaving  
Told you no single drop they were leaving,  
—Life, that filling her, passed redundant                545  
Into her very hair, back swerving  
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,  
As her head thrown back showed the white  
    throat curving,  
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,  
Moving to the mystic measure,                            550  
Bounding as the bosom bounded.  
I stopped short, more and more confounded,  
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,  
And she listened and she listened :  
When all at once a hand detained me,                    555  
And the selfsame contagion gained me,

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

And I kept time to the wondrous chime,  
Making out words and prose and rhyme,  
Till it seemed that the music furled  
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped 560  
From under the words it first had propped,  
And left them midway in the world,  
And word took word as hand takes hand,  
I could hear at last, and understand,  
And when I held the unbroken thread, 565  
The Gipsy said :—

“ And so at last we find my tribe,  
And so I set thee in the midst,  
And to one and all of them describe  
What thou saidst and what thou didst, 570  
Our long and terrible journey through,  
And all thou art ready to say and do  
In the trials that remain :  
I trace them the vein and the other vein  
That meet on thy brow and part again, 575  
Making our rapid mystic mark ;  
And I bid my people prove and probe  
Each eye’s profound and glorious globe  
Till they detect the kindred spark  
In those depths so drear and dark, 580  
Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,  
Circling over the midnight sea.  
And on that round young cheek of thine  
I make them recognise the tinge,

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

- As when of the costly scarlet wine 585  
They drip so much as will impinge  
And spread in a thinnest scale afloat  
One thick gold drop from the olive's coat  
Over a silver plate whose sheen  
Still thro' the mixture shall be seen. 590  
For so I prove thee, to one and all,  
Fit, when my people ope their breast,  
To see the sign, and hear the call  
And take the vow, and stand the test  
Which adds one more child to the rest— 595  
When the breast is bare and the arms  
are wide,  
And the world is left outside.  
For there is probation to decree,  
And many and long must the trials be  
Thou shalt victoriously endure, 600  
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure ;  
Like a jewel-finder's fierce assay  
Of the prize he dug from its mountain tomb,—  
Let once the vindicating ray  
Leap out amid the anxious gloom, 605  
And steel and fire have done their part  
And the prize falls on its finder's heart ;  
So, trial after trial past,  
Wilt thou fall at the very last  
Breathless, half in trance 610  
With the thrill of the great deliverance,  
Into our arms for evermore

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

And thou shalt know, those arms once curled  
About thee, what we knew before,  
How love is the only good in the world. 615

Henceforth be loved as heart can love,  
Or brain devise, or hand approve !

Stand up, look below,

It is our life at thy feet we throw

To step with into light and joy ; 620

Not a power of life but we'll employ  
To satisfy thy nature's want ;

Art thou the tree that props the plant,

Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—

Canst thou help us, must we help thee ? 625

If any two creatures grew into one,

They would do more than the world has done ;

Though each apart were never so weak,

Yet vainly through the world should ye seek

For the knowledge and the might 630

Which in such union grew their right :

So, to approach, at least, that end,

And blend,—as much as may be, blend

Thee with us or us with thee,

As climbing-plant or propping-tree, 635

Shall someone deck thee, over and down,

Up and about, with blossoms and leaves ?

Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland-crown,

Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,

Die on thy boughs and disappear 640

While not a leaf of thine is sere ?

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

- Or is the other fate in store,  
And art thou fitted to adore,  
To give thy wondrous self away,  
And take a stronger nature's sway ?                          645  
I foresee and I could foretell  
Thy future portion, sure and well—  
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,  
And let them say what thou shalt do !
- Only, be sure thy daily life,                          650  
In its peace, or in its strife,  
Never shall be unobserved ;  
We pursue thy whole career,  
And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,—
- Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved,                  655  
We are beside thee, in all thy ways,  
With our blame, with our praise,  
Our shame to feel, our pride to show,  
Glad, angry—but indifferent, no !
- Whether it is thy lot to go,                          660  
For the good of us all, where the haters <sup>meet</sup>  
In the crowded city's horrible street ;  
Or thou step alone through the morass  
Where never sound yet was
- Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill, <sup>15</sup> 665  
For the air is still, and the water still,  
When the blue breast of the dipping coot  
Dives under, and all is mute.  
So at the last shall come old age,  
Decrepit as befits that stage ;

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

- How else wouldest thou retire apart  
With the hoarded memories of thy heart,  
And gather all to the very least  
Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,  
Let fall through eagerness to find      675  
The crowning dainties yet behind ?  
Ponder on the entire Past  
Laid together thus at last,  
When the twilight helps to fuse  
The first fresh, with the faded hues,      680  
And the outline of the whole,  
As round eve's shades their framework roll,  
Grandly fronts for once thy soul.  
And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam  
Of yet another morning breaks,      685  
And like the hand which ends a dream,  
Death, with the might of his sunbeam,  
Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,  
Then—— ”
- Ay, then, indeed, something would happen !  
But what ? For here her voice changed like a  
bird's ;      691  
There grew more of the music and less of the  
words ;
- Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen  
To paper and put you down every syllable  
With those clever clerkly fingers,      695  
All that I've forgotten as well as what lingers  
In this old brain of mine that's but ill able

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

To give you even this poor version  
Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering  
—More fault of those who had the hammering  
Of prosody into me and syntax,      701  
And did it, not with hobnails but tin-tacks !  
But to return from this excursion,—  
Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,  
The peace most deep and the charm completest,  
There came, shall I say, a snap— .      706  
And the charm vanished !  
And my sense returned, so strangely banished,  
And, starting as from a nap,  
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,      710  
With Jacynth asleep ; and but one spring  
made I,  
Down from the casement, round to the portal,  
Another minute and I had entered,—  
When the door opened, and more than mortal  
Stood, with a face where to my mind centred 715  
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,  
The Duchess—I stopped as if struck by palsy.  
She was so different, happy and beautiful,  
I felt at once that all was best,  
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,      720  
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful.  
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding,  
—I saw the glory of her eyc,      723  
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,  
And I was hers to live or to die.

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

As for finding what she wanted,  
You know God Almighty granted  
Such little signs should serve His wild creatures  
To tell one another all their desires,  
So that each knows what its friend requires, 730  
And does its bidding without teachers.

I preceded her ; the crone  
Followed silent and alone ;  
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered  
In the old style ; both her eyes had slunk 735  
Back to their pits ; her stature shrunk ;  
In short, the soul in its body sunk  
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.

We descended, I preceding ;  
Crossed the court with nobody heeding ; 740  
All the world was at the chase,  
The court-yard like a desert-place,  
The stable emptied of its small fry ;  
I saddled myself the very palfrey

I remembered patting while it carried her, 745  
The day she arrived and the Duke married her.  
And, do you know, though it's easy deceiving  
Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing  
The Lady had not forgotten it either,

And knew the poor devil so much beneath her 750  
Would have been only too glad for her service  
To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,  
But unable to pay proper duty where owing it  
Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it :

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

For though the moment I began setting      755  
His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting.  
(Not that I meant to be obtrusive)  
She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,  
By a single rapid finger's lifting,  
And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,      760  
And a little shake of the head, refused me,—  
I say, although she never used me,  
Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind  
her,  
And I ventured to remind her,  
I suppose with a voice of less steadiness      765  
Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me,  
—Something to the effect that I was in readiness  
Whene'er God should please she needed me,—  
Then, do you know, her face looked down on me  
With a look that placed a crown on me,      770  
And she felt in her bosom,—mark, her bosom—  
And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,  
Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse  
Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,  
Why, you see, as soon as I found myself      775  
So understood,—that a true heart so may gain  
Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,  
Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself !  
It was a little plait of hair  
Such as friends in a convent make      780  
To wear, each for the other's sake,—  
This, see, which at my breast I wear,

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

Ever did (rather to Jacynth's judgment),  
And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.  
And then,—and then,—to cut short,—this is idle,  
These are feelings it is not good to foster,— 786  
I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,  
And the palfrey bounded,—and so we lost her.

XVI

When the liquor's out, why clink the cannikin ?  
I did think to describe you the panic in 790  
The redoubtable breast of our master the  
mannikin,  
And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,  
How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib  
Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,  
When she heard, what she called, the flight of  
the feloness 795

—But it seems such child's play,  
What they said and did with the Lady away !  
And to dance on, when we've lost the music,  
Always made me—and no doubt makes you—  
sick.

Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so  
stern 800

As that sweet form disappeared through the  
postern,

She that kept it in constant good humour,  
It ought to have stopped ; there seemed nothing  
to do more.

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

But the world thought otherwise and went on,  
And my head's one that its spite was spent on :  
Thirty years are fled since that morning, 806  
And with them all my head's adorning.  
Nor did the old Duchess die outright,  
As you expect, of suppressed spite,  
The natural end of every adder 810  
Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder :  
But she and her son agreed, I take it,  
That no one should touch on the story to  
wake it,  
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,  
So, they made no search and small inquiry— 815  
And when fresh Gipsics have paid us a visit, I've  
 Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,  
But told them they're folks the Duke don't  
 want here,  
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.  
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was  
 glad of it, 820  
And the old one was in the young one's stead,  
And took, in her place, the household's head,  
And a blessed time the household had of it !  
And were I not, as a man might say, cautious  
How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,  
I could favour you with sundry touches 826  
Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess  
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellow-  
ness

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

(To get on faster) until at last her  
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster      830  
Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse :  
In short, she grew from scalp to udder  
Just the object to make your shudder.

XVII

You're my friend—  
What a thing friendship is, world without er'd !  
How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up      836  
As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,  
And poured out, all lovelily, sparklingly, sunlit,  
Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,  
Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids—      840  
Friendship may match with that monarch of  
Druids ;  
Each supples a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-  
outs,  
Gives your life's hour-glass a shake when the  
thin sand doubts  
Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees  
Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.  
I have seen my little Lady once more,      846  
Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,  
For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before ;  
I always wanted to make a clean breast of it :  
And now it is made—why, my heart's-blood,  
that went trickle,      850  
Trickle, but anon, in such muddy dribblets,

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,  
And genially floats me about the giblets.  
I'll tell you what I intend to do :  
I must see this fellow his sad life through— 855  
He is our Duke, after all,  
And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.  
My father was born here, and I inherit  
His fame, a chain he bound his son with :  
Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it, 860  
But there's no mine to blow up and get done with,  
So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.  
For, as to our middle-age-manners-adapter,  
Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,  
Some day or other, his head in a morion, 865  
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he'll kick up,  
Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.  
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke  
rust,  
And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue  
crust,  
Then, I shall scrape together my earnings ; 870  
For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes,  
And our children all went the way of the roses :  
It's a long lane that knows no turnings.  
One needs but little tackle to travel in ;  
So, just one stout cloak shall I indue : 875  
And for a staff, what beats the javelin  
With which his boars my father pinned you ?

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-1889

And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,  
Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinful,  
I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly ! 880  
Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful.

What's a man's age ? He must hurry more,  
    that's all ;

Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to  
    hold :

When we mind labour, then only, we're too old—  
What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul ?  
And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship  
    sees,

(Come all the way from the north-parts with  
    sperm oil)

I hope to get safely out of the turmoil  
And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,  
And find my Lady, or hear the last news of her  
From some old thief and son of Lucifer,       891  
His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,  
Sunburned all over like an *Æthiop*.

And when my Cotnar begins to operate  
And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper  
    rate,   895

And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid  
    dent,

I shall drop in with—as if by accident—  
“ You never knew then, how it all ended,  
What fortunes good or bad attended  
The little Lady your Queen befriended ? ”     900

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

—And when that's told me, what's remaining ?  
This world's too hard for my explaining.  
The same wise judge of matters equine  
Who still preferred some slim four-year-old  
To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold, 905  
And, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,  
He also must be such a Lady's scorner !  
Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau :  
Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw.  
—So, I shall find out some snug corner 910  
Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,  
Turn myself round and bid the world good night ;  
And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing  
Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)  
To a world where will be no further throwing 915  
Pearls before swine that can't value them.  
Amen !

## THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

WE always feel that Matthew Arnold waited, like his own Scholar Gypsy, for "the spark from heaven to fall." His poems never truly burn ; they have a rare quality of the mind rather than an emotion of the heart. The lyrics themselves are apt to become verse-essays in morality and philosophy. Even *Thyrsis* and the beautiful *Rugby Chapel* falter in their grief, and lose their sorrow in argument. For this reason, perhaps, we should be inclined to rank Arnold's

## MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822-1888

narrative above his lyric poetry. In *The Forsaken Merman* the educationist and critic made a valiant and, on the whole, successful attempt to appeal to children. He caught at least a felicity of language and power of expression which lift the more ambitious *Sohrab and Rustum* to the higher levels of English poetic narrative ; though that poem is also fully charged with the style and even the idiom of classical verse. The influence of Wordsworth was one which Arnold never entirely escaped ; but it deadened him as much as it inspired him. Arnold was always too apt to interpret life through books rather than through experience ; to cling to education and the University. In this half narrative, half dramatic poem, however, we turn from the philosopher and poet of the Oxford countryside to an Arnold who could tell a story both simply and effectively. Here and there, perhaps, in the middle of the tale both Vizier and sick King are in danger of tumbling into the mire of Arnold the moralist ; but the story is triumphantly rescued by an ending as effective as anything Arnold ever wrote :

“ *I have a fretted brick-work tomb  
Upon a hill on the right hand,  
Hard by a close of apricots,  
Upon the road of Samarcand :* ”

“ . . . *Bring water, nard, and linen rolls.  
Wash off all blood, set smooth each limb.  
Then say : ‘ He was not wholly vile,  
Because a king shall bury him.’ ”*

This has the fundamental simplicity of so beauti-

## THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

ful a thing as “Strew on her roses, roses,” or the fine last lines of *Rugby Chapel*.



### HUSSEIN

O most just Vizier, send away  
The cloth-merchants, and let them be,  
Them and their dues, this day : the King  
Is ill at ease, and calls for thee.

### THE VIZIER

O merchants, tarry yet a day                                5  
Here in Bokhara : but at noon  
To-morrow, come, and ye shall pay  
Each fortieth web of cloth to me,  
As the law is, and go your way.  
O Hussein, lead me to the King.                            10  
Thou teller of sweet tales, thine own,  
Ferdousi’s, and the others’, lead.  
How is it with my lord ?

### HUSSEIN

Alone,  
Ever since prayer-time, he doth wait,  
O Vizier, without lying down,                                15  
In the great window of the gate,  
Looking into the Registān ;  
Where through the sellers’ booths the slaves  
Are this way bringing the dead man.                        19  
O Vizier, here is the King’s door.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822-1888

THE KING

O Vizier, I may bury him ?

THE VIZIER

O King, thou know'st, I have been sick  
These many days, and heard no thing  
(For Allah shut my ears and mind),  
Not even what thou dost, O King.                   25  
Wherefore, that I may counsel thee,  
Let Hussein, if thou wilt, make haste  
To speak in order what hath chanc'd.

THE KING

O Vizier, be it as thou say'st.

HUSSEIN

Three days since, at the time of prayer,                   30  
A certain Moollah, with his robe  
All rent, and dust upon his hair,  
Watch'd my lord's coming forth, and push'd  
The golden mace-bearers aside,  
And fell at the King's feet, and cried ;                   35

“ Justice, O King, and on myself !  
On this great sinner, who hath broke  
The law, and by the law must die !  
Vengeance, O King ! ”

But the King spoke :

## THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

“ What fool is this, that hurts our ears                  40  
With folly ? or what drunken slave ?  
My guards, what, prick him with your spears !  
Prick me the fellow from the path ! ”  
As the King said, so was it done,  
And to the mosque my lord pass'd on.                  45

But on the morrow, when the King  
Went forth again, the holy book  
Carried before him, as is right,  
And through the square his path he took ;

My man comes running, sleek'd with blood                  50  
From yesterday, and falling down  
Cries out most earnestly ; “ O King,  
My lord, O King, do right, I pray !

“ How canst thou, ere thou hear, discern  
If I speak folly ? but a king,                  55  
Whether a thing be great or small,  
Like Allah, hears and judges all.

“ Wherefore hear thou ! Thou know'st, how  
fierce  
In these last days the sun hath burn'd :  
That the green water in the tanks                  60  
Is to a putrid puddle turn'd :  
And the canal, that from the stream  
Of Samarcand is brought this way,  
Wastes, and runs thinner every day.

" Now I at nightfall had gone forth  
 Alone, and in a darksome place  
 Under some mulberry trees I found  
 A little pool ; and in brief space  
 With all the water that was there  
 I fill'd my pitcher, and stole home  
 Unseen : and having drink to spare,  
 I hid the can behind the door,  
 And went up on the roof to sleep.

65

" But in the night, which was with wind  
 And burning dust, again I creep  
 Down, having fever, for a drink.

75

" Now meanwhile had my brethren found  
 The water-pitcher, where it stood  
 Behind the door upon the ground,  
 And call'd my mother : and they all,

80

As they were thirsty, and the night  
 Most sultry, drain'd the pitcher there ;  
 That they sate with it, in my sight,  
 Their lips still wet, when I came down.

" Now mark ! I, being fever'd, sick,  
 (Most unblest also) at that sight  
 Brake forth, and curs'd them—dost thou hear ?  
 One was my mother—Now, do right ! "

85

## THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

But my lord mus'd a space, and said :  
" Send him away, Sirs, and make on. 90  
It is some madman," the King said :  
As the King said, so was it done.

The morrow at the self-same hour  
In the King's path, behold, the man,  
Not kneeling, sternly fix'd : he stood 95  
Right opposite, and thus began,  
Frowning grim down :—" Thou wicked King,  
Most deaf where thou shouldst most give ear !  
What, must I howl in the next world,  
Because thou wilt not listen here ? 100

" What, wilt thou pray, and get thee grace,  
And all grace shall to me be grudg'd ?  
Nay but, I swear, from this thy path  
I will not stir till I be judg'd."

Then they who stood about the King 105  
Drew close together and conferr'd :  
Till that the King stood forth and said,  
" Before the priests thou shalt be heard."

But when the Ulemas were met  
And the thing heard, they doubted not ; 110  
But sentenc'd him, as the law is,  
To die by stoning on the spot.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822-1888

Now the King charg'd us secretly :  
“ Ston'd must he be, the law stands so :  
Yet, if he seek to fly, give way :      115  
Forbid him not, but let him go.”

So saying, the King took a stone,  
And cast it softly : but the man,  
With a great joy upon his face,  
Kneel'd down, and cried not, neither ran.      120

So they, whose lot it was, cast stones ;  
That they flew thick and bruise'd him sore :  
But he prais'd Allah with loud voice,  
And remain'd kneeling as before.

My lord had cover'd up his face :      125  
But when one told him, “ He is dead,”  
Turning him quickly to go in,  
“ Bring thou to me his corpse,” he said.

And truly, while I speak, O King,  
I hear the bearers on the stair.      130  
Wilt thou they straightway bring him in ?  
—Ho ! enter ye who tarry there !

THE VIZIER

O King, in this I praise thee not.  
Now must I call thy grief not wise.  
Is he thy friend, or of thy blood,  
To find such favour in thine eyes ?      135

## THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

Nay, were he thine own mother's son,  
Still, thou art king, and the Law stands.  
It were not meet the balance swerv'd,  
The sword were broken in thy hands.

140

But being nothing, as he is,  
Why for no cause make sad thy face ?  
Lo, I am old : three kings, ere thee,  
Have I seen reigning in this place.

But who, through all this length of time,  
Could bear the burden of his years,  
If he for strangers pain'd his heart  
Not less than those who merit tears ?

145

Fathers we *must* have, wife and child ;  
And grievous is the grief for these :  
This pain alone, which *must* be borne,  
Makes the head white, and bows the knees.

150

But other loads than this his own  
One man is not well made to bear.  
Besides, to each are his own friends,  
To mourn with him, and show him care.

155

Look, this is but one single place,  
Though it be great : all the earth round,  
If a man bear to have it so,  
Things which might vex him shall be found.

159

229

MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822-1888

Upon the Russian frontier, where  
The watchers of two armies stand  
Near one another, many a man,  
Seeking a prey unto his hand,

Hath snatch'd a little fair-hair'd slave :      165  
They snatch also, towards Mervè,  
The Shiah dogs, who pasture sheep,  
And up from thence to Orgunjè.

And these all, labouring for a lord,  
Eat not the fruit of their own hands :      170  
Which is the heaviest of all plagues,  
To that man's mind, who understands.

The kaffirs also (whom God curse !)  
Vex one another, night and day :  
There are the lepers, and all sick :      175  
There are the poor, who faint alway.

All these have sorrow, and keep still,  
Whilst other men make cheer, and sing.  
Wilt thou have pity on all these ?  
No, nor on this dead dog, O King !      180

THE KING

O Vizier, thou art old, I young.  
Clear in these things I cannot see.  
My head is burning ; and a heat  
Is in my skin which angers me.

## THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

But hear ye this, ye sons of men ! 185  
They that bear rule, and are obey'd,  
Unto a rule more strong than theirs  
Are in their turn obedient made.

In vain therefore, with wistful eyes  
Gazing up hither, the poor man, 190  
Who loiters by the high-heap'd booths,  
Below there, in the Registān,

Says, " Happy he, who lodges there !  
With silken raiment, store of rice,  
And for this drought, all kinds of fruits, 195  
Grape syrup, squares of colour'd ice,

" With cherries serv'd in drifts of snow."  
In vain hath a king power to build  
Houses, arcades, enamell'd mosques ;  
And to make orchard closes, fill'd 200

With curious fruit trees, bought from far ;  
With cisterns for the winter rain ;  
And in the desert, spacious inns  
In divers places ;—if that pain

Is not more lighten'd, which he feels, 205  
If his will be not satisfied :  
And that it be not, from all time  
The Law is planted, to abide.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822-1888

Thou wert a sinner, thou poor man !  
Thou wert athirst ; and didst not see,  
That, though we snatch what we desire,  
We must not snatch it eagerly.

210

And I have meat and drink at will,  
And rooms of treasures, not a few.  
But I am sick, nor heed I these :  
And what I would, I cannot do.

215

Even the great honour which I have,  
When I am dead, will soon grow still.  
So have I neither joy, nor fame.  
But what I can do, that I will.

220

I have a fretted brick-work tomb  
Upon a hill on the right hand,  
Hard by a close of apricots,  
Upon the road of Samarcand :

Thither, O Vizier, will I bear  
This man my pity could not save ;  
And, plucking up the marble flags,  
There lay his body in my grave.

225

Bring water, nard, and linen rolls.  
Wash off all blood, set smooth each limb.  
Then say ; " He was not wholly vile,  
Because a king shall bury him."

230

## THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

HERE were two William Morrises. One of them was the reformer-craftsman, who wrote of and sought out a new Utopia that should be built in the wastes of mid-nineteenth-century materialism. The other was the artist whose mind dwelt on the romance and colour of the past, and tried to recreate in his own work its spirit and atmosphere. His two long narrative poems *The Life and Death of Jason* and *Sigurd the Volsung* are attempts at the transplanting old and strange legend into the soil of English poetry ; and they may be fitly compared with Tennyson's similar experiment in *The Idylls of the King* (see p. 167). But William Morris was at his best when he resang a mediæval song, and captured again the dark sorrow as well as the romantic beauty of the Middle Ages. This poem, *The Haystack in the Floods*, is an example of his finest work. It is a lyric-narrative ; for the actual story is subordinated to the woeful agony of Jehane, from the moving simplicity of the first two lines :

“ Had she come all the way for this,  
To part at last without a kiss ? ”

to the starkness of the ending :

“ She shook her head and gazed awhile  
At her cold hands with rueful smile,  
As though this thing had made her mad.”

Between those two points—the beginning and the swift ending of her woe—Morris has packed a wealth of mediæval grimness and villainy, treachery and evil, courage and devotion ; and

## WILLIAM MORRIS, 1834-1896

set it all in an atmosphere of unreal reality punctuated by the slow, dismal dripping of rain. This rain (like Browning's in the wonderful first lines of *Porphyria's Lover*) is almost a character in the action ; it pervades the whole ; the marvellous pictures of the poem are steeped in its sad monotony. Morris was, indeed, profoundly influenced by the painting of Rossetti, and was himself one of that school of poet-painters called "the pre-Raphaelites." But his greatness, in a poem like this, is to quicken an old subject into life, and close up the centuries between his time and Jehane's. Beside *The Haystack in the Floods* so beautiful a thing as *The Lady of Shalott*—a companion series of pictures—is unreal and shadowy, like a dream.



Had she come all the way for this,  
To part at last without a kiss ?  
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain  
That her own eyes might see him slain  
Beside the haystack in the floods ?

5

Along the dripping leafless woods,  
The stirrup touching either shoe,  
She rode astride as troopers do ;  
With kirtle kilted to her knee,  
To which the mud splash'd wretchedly ;

10

And the wet dripp'd from every tree  
Upon her head and heavy hair,  
And on her eyelids broad and fair ;  
The tears and rain ran down her face.

## THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

By fits and starts they rode apace,                            15  
And very often was his place  
Far off from her ; he had to ride  
Ahead, to see what might betide  
When the roads cross'd ; and sometimes, when  
There rose a murmuring from his men,                    20  
Had to turn back with promises ;  
Ah me ! she had but little ease ;  
And often for pure doubt and dread  
She sobb'd, made giddy in the head  
By the swift riding ; while, for cold,                    25  
Her slender fingers scarce could hold  
The wet reins ; yea, and scarcely, too,  
She felt the foot within her shoe  
Against the stirrup : all for this,  
To part at last without a kiss                            30  
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,  
They saw across the only way  
That Judas, Godmar, and the three  
Red running lions dismally                            35  
Grinn'd from his pennon, under which,  
In one straight line along the ditch,  
They counted thirty heads.  
So then,  
While Robert turn'd round to his men,  
She saw at once the wretched end,                    40  
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend

WILLIAM MORRIS, 1834-1896

Her coif the wrong way from her head,  
And hid her eyes ; while Robert said :  
“ Nay, love, ‘tis scarcely two to one,  
At Poictiers where we made them run      45  
So fast—why, sweet my love, good cheer,  
The Gascon frontier is so near,  
Nought after this.”

But, “ O,” she said,  
“ My God ! my God ! I have to tread  
The long way back without you ; then      50  
The court at Paris ; those six men ;  
The gratings of the Chatelet ;  
The swift Seine on some rainy day  
Like this, and people standing by,  
And laughing, while my weak hands try      55  
To recollect how strong men swim.  
All this, or else a life with him,  
For which I should be damned at last,  
Would God that this next hour were past ! ”

He answer’d not, but cried his cry,      60  
“ St. George for Marny ! ” cheerily ;  
And laid his hand upon her rein.  
Alas ! no man of all his train  
Gave back that cheery cry again ;  
And, while for rage his thumb beat fast      65  
Upon his sword-hilts, some one cast  
About his neck a kerchief long,  
And bound him.

## THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

Then they went along  
To Godmar ; who said : " Now, Jehane,  
Your lover's life is on the wane                      70  
So fast, that, if this very hour  
You yield not as my paramour,  
He will not see the rain leave off—  
Nay, keep your tongue from gibe and scoff,  
Sir Robert, or I slay you now."                      75

She laid her hand upon her brow,  
Then gazed upon the palm, as though  
She thought her forehead bled, and—" No,"  
She said, and turn'd her head away,  
As there were nothing else to say,                      80  
And everything were settled : red  
Grew Godmar's face from chin to head :  
" Jehane, on yonder hill there stands  
My castle, guarding well my lands :  
What hinders me from taking you,                      85  
And doing that I list to do  
To your fair wilful body, while  
Your knight lies dead ? "

### A wicked smile

Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,  
A long way out she thrust her chin :                      90  
" You know that I should strangle you  
While you were sleeping ; or bite through  
Your throat, by God's help—ah ! " she said,  
" Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid !

WILLIAM MORRIS, 1834-1896

For in such wise they hem me in,  
I cannot choose but sin and sin,  
Whatever happens : yet I think  
They could not make me eat or drink,  
And so should I just reach my rest."

95

" Nay, if you do not my behest,  
O Jehane ! though I love you well,"  
Said Godmar, " would I fail to tell  
All that I know ? " " Foul lies," she said.  
" Eh ? lies, my Jehane ? by God's head,  
At Paris folks would deem them true !  
Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you,  
' Jehane the brown ! Jehane the brown !  
Give us Jehane to burn or drown ! '—  
Eh—gag me Robert !—sweet my friend,  
This were indeed a piteous end  
For those long fingers, and long feet,  
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet ;  
An end that few men would forget  
That saw it—So, an hour yet :  
Consider, Jehane, which to take  
Of life or death ! "

100

105

110

115

So, scarce awake,  
Dismounting, did she leave that place,  
And totter some yards : with her face  
Turn'd upward to the sky she lay,  
Her head on a wet heap of hay,

120

## THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

And fell asleep : and while she slept,  
And did not dream, the minutes crept  
Round to the twelve again : but she,  
Being waked at last, sigh'd quietly,  
And strangely childlike came, and said :      125  
“ I will not.” Straightway Godmar’s head,  
As though it hung on strong wires, turn’d  
Most sharply round, and his face burn’d.

For Robert—both his eyes were dry,  
He could not weep, but gloomily      130  
He seem’d to watch the rain ; yea, too,  
His lips were firm ; he tried once more  
To touch her lips ; she reach’d out, sore  
And vain desire so tortured them,  
The poor grey lips, and now the hem      135  
Of his sleeve brush’d them.

With a start

Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart ;  
From Robert’s throat he loosed the bands  
Of silk and mail ; with empty hands  
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw      140  
The long bright blade without a flaw  
Glide out from Godmar’s sheath, his hand  
In Robert’s hair ; she saw him bend  
Back Robert’s head ; she saw him send  
The thin steel down ; the blow told well,      145  
Right backward the knight Robert fell,  
And moan’d as dogs do, being half dead,

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, 1832-1914

Unwitting, as I deem : so then  
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,  
Who ran, some five or six, and beat  
His head to pieces at their feet.

150

Then Godmar turn'd again and said :  
“ So, Jehane, the first fitte is read !  
Take note, my lady, that your way  
Lies backward to the Chatelet ! ”

155

She shook her head and gazed awhile  
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,-  
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had  
Beside the haystack in the floods.

160

DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

THIS is a stirring poem of an event in our history which has inspired many writers, both in prose and in verse. It is, perhaps, natural that England should be rich in sea songs, and songs of ships that do business in great waters. We find, in actual fact, that much of our deliberately "patriotic" verse centres about the Armada in the sixteenth century and Trafalgar in the early nineteenth. But it is customary to celebrate the triumphs of a nation and national character through the heroic feats of the individual ; and this poem belongs to a

## DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

group of comparatively modern poems that recount the tale of mighty courage and valiant deeds. We may, perhaps, find it profitable to recall some of them : Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *The Revenge*; Browning's *Incident of the French Camp*, *How they brought the Good News* and *Hervé Riel*; Sir Francis Doyle's *The British Soldier in China*; and, a little later, in praise of what is sometimes known as "the public school spirit," Newbolt's *He fell among Thieves* and *Vitai Lampada*. For vigour and force David Gwynn's story must be reckoned high in the list. In subject it has affinities with *The Revenge*, and in treatment with *Hervé Riel*. Watts-Dunton could not, indeed, quite attain to the consummate art of Tennyson :

"*And the sun went down and the stars came out,  
far over the summer sea,  
But never a moment ceased the fight of the one  
and the fifty-three,*"

or catch the wonderful dramatic sense of Browning, although he follows Browning in using the personal rather than the "objective" narrative. But the story is nevertheless full of life and virile strength ; while in such lines as—

"*Then through the curtains of the morning mist,  
That take all shifting colours as they shake,  
I see the great Armada coil and twist  
Miles, miles along the ocean's amethyst,  
Like hell's snake of hate—the winged snake,*"

he betrays that love of a picture which he had

learnt from Swinburne and others in the days towards the end of the last century when poetry and art were drawn very near together.



"A galley lie" they called my tale ; but he  
 Whose talk is with the deep kens mighty tales.  
*The man, I say, who helped to keep you free*  
 Stands here, a truthful son of truthful Wales.  
 Slandered by England as a loose-lipped liar, 5  
 Banished from Ireland, branded rogue and  
 thief,  
 Here stands that Gwynn whose life of torments  
 dire  
 Heaven sealed for England, sealed in blood and  
 fire—  
 Stands asking here Truth's one reward, belief !

And Spain shall tell, with pallid lips of dread, 10  
 This tale of mine—shall tell, in future days,  
 How Gwynn, the galley-slave, once fought and  
 bled  
 For England when she moved in perilous ways ;  
 But say, ye gentlemen of England, sprung  
 From loins of men whose ghosts have still the  
 sea— 15  
 Doth England—she who loves the loudest  
 tongue—  
*Remember mariners whose deeds are sung*  
 By waves where flowed their blood to keep  
 her free ?

## DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

I see—I see ev'n now—those ships of Spain  
Gathered in Tagus' mouth to make the spring ;  
I feel the cursèd oar, I toil again,      21  
And trumpets blare, and priests and choir-  
boys sing ;  
And morning strikes with many a crimson shaft,  
Through ruddy haze, four galleys rowing out—  
Four galleys built to pierce the English craft, 25  
Each swivel-gunned for raking fore and aft,  
Snouted like sword-fish, but with iron snout.

And one we call the *Princess*, one the *Royal*,  
*Diana* one ; but 'tis the fell *Basana*  
Where I am toiling, Gwynn, the true, the loyal,  
Thinking of mighty Drake and Gloriana ;    31  
For by their help Hope whispers me that I—  
Whom ten hours' daily travail at a stretch  
Has taught how sweet a thing it is to die—  
May strike once more where flags of England fly,  
Strike for myself and many a haggard wretch.

True sorrow knows a tale it may not tell :  
Again I feel the lash that tears my back ;  
Again I hear mine own blaspheming yell,  
Answered by boatswain's laugh and scourge's  
crack ;      40  
Again I feel the pang when trying to choke  
Rather than drink the wine, or chew the bread

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, 1832-1914

Wherewith, when rest for meals would break the stroke,  
They cram our mouths while still we sit at yoke ;  
Again is Life, not Death, the shape of dread.

By Finisterre there comes a sudden gale, 46  
And mighty waves assault our trembling galley  
With blows that strike her waist as strikes a flail,  
And soldiers cry, "What saint shall bid her rally ? "

Some slaves refuse to row, and some implore 50  
The Dons to free them from the metal tether.  
By which their limbs are locked upon the oar ;  
Some shout, in answer to the billows' roar,  
" The Dons and we will drink brine-wine  
together."

" Bring up the slave," I hear the captain cry, 55  
" Who sank the golden galleon *El Dorado*.  
The dog can steer."

        " Here sits the dog," quoth I,  
        " Who sank the ship of Commodore Medrado ! "  
With hell-lit eyes, blistered by spray and rain,  
        Standing upon the bridge, saith he to me : 60  
        " Hearken, thou pirate—bold Medrado's bane ! —  
Freedom and gold are thine, and thanks of Spain,  
        If thou canst take the galley through this sea."

## DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

" Ay ! ay ! " quoth I. The fools unlock me straight !

And then 'tis I give orders to the Don, 65

Laughing within to hear the laugh of Fate,

Whose winning game I know hath just begun.  
I mount the bridge when dies the last red streak

Of evening, and the moon seems fain for night.  
Oh then I see beneath the galley's beak 70  
A glow like Spanish *auto*'s<sup>1</sup> ruddy reek—

Oh then these eyes behold a wondrous sight !

A skeleton, but yet with living eyes—

A skeleton, but yet with bones like gold—

Squats on the galley-beak, in wondrous wise, 75

And round his brow, of high imperial mould,  
A burning circle seems to shake and shine,

Bright, fiery bright, with many a living gem,  
Throwing a radiance o'er the foami-lit brine :

" 'Tis God's Revenge," methinks. " Heaven  
sends for sign 80

That bony shape—that Inca's diadem."

At first the sign is only seen of me,

But well I know that God's Revenge hath come  
To strike the Armada, set old ocean free, 84

And cleanse from stain of Spain the beauteous  
foam.

<sup>1</sup> The public burning of heretics sentenced by the Court of the Inquisition.

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, 1832-1914

Quoth I, " How fierce soever be the levin  
Spain's hand can hurl—made mightier still for  
wrong  
By that great Scarlet One whose hills are  
seven<sup>1</sup>—  
Yea, howsoever Hell may scoff at Heaven—  
Stronger than Hell is God, though Hell is  
strong." 90

"The dog can steer," I laugh ; "yea, Drake's  
men know  
How sea-dogs hold a ship to Biscay waves."  
Ah ! when I bid the soldiers go below,  
Some 'neath the hatches, some beside the  
slaves,  
And bid them stack their muskets all in piles 95  
Beside the foremast, covered by a sail,  
The captives guess my plan—I see their smiles  
As down the waist the cozened troop desiles,  
Staggering and stumbling landsmen, faint and  
pale.

I say, they guess my plan—to send beneath 100  
The soldiers to the benches where the slaves  
Sit, armed with eager nails and eager teeth—  
Hate's nails and teeth more keen than Spanish  
glaives,

<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church.

## DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

Then wait until the tempest's waxing might  
Shall reach its fiercest, mingling sea and sky,  
Then seize the key, unlock the slaves, and  
smite

106

The sea-sick soldiers in their helpless plight,  
Then bid the Spaniards pull at oar or die.

Past Ferrol Bay each galley 'gins to stoop,  
Shuddering before the Biscay demon's breath.  
Down goes a prow—down goes a gaudy poop : 111  
“ The Don's *Diana* bears the Don to death,”  
Quoth I, “ and see the *Princess* plunge and wallow  
Down purple trough, o'er snowy crest of foam :  
See ! See ! the *Royal*, how she tries to follow 115  
By many a glimmering crest and shimmering  
hollow,  
Where gull and petrel scarcely dare to roam.”

The four queen-galleys pass Cape Finisterre ;  
The Armada, dreaming but of ocean-storms,  
Thinks not of mutineers with shoulders bare, 120  
Chained, bloody-wealed and pale, on galley-  
forms,  
Each rower murmuring o'er my whispered plan,  
Deep-burnt within his brain in words of fire,  
“ Rise, every man, to tear to death his man—  
Yea, tear as only galley-captives can, 125  
When God's Revenge sings loud to ocean's  
lyre.”

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, 1832-1914

Taller the spectre grows 'mid ocean's din ;

The captain sees the Skeleton and pales :

I give the sign : the slaves cry, " Ho for Gwynn ! "

" Teach them," quoth I, " the way we grip  
in Wales." 130

And, leaping down where hateful boatswains  
shake,

I win the key—let loose a storm of slaves :

" When captives hold the whip, let drivers  
quake,"

They cry ; " sit down, ye Dons, and row for  
Drake,

Or drink to England's Queen in foaming  
waves." 135

We leap adown the hatches ; in the dark

We stab the Dons at random, till I see  
A spark that trembles like a tinder-spark,

Waxing and brightening, till it seems to be  
A fleshless skull, with eyes of joyful fire : 140

Then, lo ! a bony shape with lifted hands—  
A bony mouth that chants an anthem dire,

O'er�opping groans, o'er�opping Ocean's quire—  
A skeleton with Inca's diadem stands !

It sings the song I heard an Indian sing, 145

Chained by the ruthless Dons to burn at stake,  
When priests of Tophet <sup>1</sup> chanted in a ring,

Sniffling man's flesh at roast for Christ His sake.

<sup>1</sup> Hell.

## DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

The Spaniards hear : they see : they fight no more ;

They cross their foreheads, but they dare not speak. 150

Anon the spectre, when the strife is o'er,  
Melts from the dark, then glimmers as before,  
Burning upon the conquered galley's beak.

And now the moon breaks through the night, and shows

The *Royal* bearing down upon our craft— 155  
Then comes a broadside close at hand, which strows

Our deck with bleeding bodies fore and aft.

I take the helm ; I put the galley near :

We grapple in silver sheen of moonlit surge.

Amid the *Royal's* din I laugh to hear 160  
The curse of many a British mutineer,

The crack, crack, crack of boatswain's biting scourge.

" Ye scourge in vain," quoth I, " scourging for life

Slaves who shall row no more to save the Don " ;

For from the *Royal's* poop, above the strife, 165  
Their captain gazes at our Skeleton !

" What ! is it thou, Pirate of *El Dorado* ? "

He shouts in English tongue. And there, behold !

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, 1832-1914

Stands he, the devil's commodore, Medrado.

"Ay ! ay !" quoth I, "Spain owes me one  
strappado

For scuttling Philip's ship of stolen gold. 171

"I come for that strappado now," quoth I.

"What means yon thing of burning bones ?"  
he saith.

"'Tis God's Revenge cries 'Bloody Spain shall  
die !'

The king of El Dorado's name is Death. 175  
Strike home, ye slaves ; your hour is coming  
swift,"

I cry ; "strong hands are stretched to save  
you now ;

Show yonder spectre you are worth the gift."

But when the *Royal*, captured, rides adrift,

I look : the skeleton hath left our prow. 180

When all are slain, the tempest's wings have fled,

But still the sea is dreaming of the storm :

Far down the offing glows a spot of red,

My soul knows well it hath that Inca's form.

"It lights," quoth I, "the red cross banner of  
Spain : 185

There on the flagship where Medina sleeps—

Hell's banner, wet with sweat of Indians' pain,

And tears of women yoked to treasure train,

Scarlet of blood for which the New World  
weeps."

## DAVID GWYNN'S STORY

There on the dark the flagship of the Don 190  
To me seems luminous of the spectre's glow ;  
But soon an arc of gold, and then the Sun,  
Rise o'er the reddening billows, proud and slow ;  
Then, through the curtains of the morning mist,  
That take all shifting colours as they shake,  
I see the great Armada coil and twist 196  
Miles, miles along the ocean's amethyst,  
Like an enormous rainbow-tinted snake.

And, when the hazy veils of Morn are thinned,  
That snake accursed, with wings which swell  
and puff 200  
Before the slackening horses of the wind,  
Turns into shining ships that tack and luff.  
"Behold," quoth I, "their floating citadels,  
The same the priests have vouch'd for musket-proof,  
Caracks<sup>1</sup> and hulks and nimble caravels,<sup>2</sup> 205  
That sailed with us to sound of Lisbon bells—  
Yea, sailed from Tagus' mouth, for Christ's behoof.

For Christ's behoof they sailed : see how they go  
With that red skeleton to show the way  
There sitting on Medina's stem aglow— 210  
A hundred sail and forty-nine, men say ;

<sup>1</sup> *Caracks* : large merchantmen.

<sup>2</sup> *caravels* : light sailing-vessels.

## MARTIN ARMSTRONG (POET OF TO-DAY)

Behold them, brothers, galleon<sup>1</sup> and galeasse<sup>2</sup>—

Their dizened turrets bright of many a plume,  
Their gilded poops, their shining guns of brass,  
Their trucks, their flags—behold them, how they  
pass—

215

With God's Revenge for figurehead—to  
Doom!"

## MISS THOMPSON GOES SHOPPING

THIS is a modern narrative poem with a strange effect of realism. It seems very far from the romance that characterises most of the other poems in this book; and is even strongly contrasted with the only other outstanding realistic narrative printed here—Crabbe's *Peter Grimes*. But the half mock-heroic air (the solemn marginal notes cannot but remind us of *The Ancient Mariner*), the exquisite characterisation of Miss Thompson herself, with its humour that, like all true humour, is very near to pathos, the delicious portraits of the various tradesmen whom Miss Thompson patronises, and the whimsical style of the verse itself, give this poem an originality and freshness which some other modern poets have long sought but never found. The poem has indeed lifted

<sup>1</sup> *galleon*: large treasure-ship.

<sup>2</sup> *galeasse*: a large type of ship rowed with oars.

## MISS THOMPSON GOES SHOPPING

up the simple and ordinary into a higher realm ; and has lifted them up, not with a Wordsworthian solemnity, but with a delicate and beautiful humour.



In her lone cottage on the downs,  
With winds and blizzards and great crowns  
Of shining cloud, with wheeling plover  
And short grass sweet with the small white  
clover,

Miss  
Thompson  
at Home.

Miss Thompson lived, correct and meek.      5  
A lonely spinster, and every week  
On market-day she used to go  
Into the little town below,  
Tucked in the great down's hollow bowl  
Like pebbles gathered in a shoal.      10

So, having washed her plates and cup  
And banked the kitchen-fire up.  
Miss Thompson slipped upstairs and dressed,  
Put on her black (her second best),  
The bonnet trimmed with rusty plush,      15  
Peeped in the glass with simpering blush,  
From camphor-smelling cupboard took  
Her thicker jacket off the hook  
Because the day might turn to cold.  
Then, ready, slipped downstairs and rolled 20  
The hearthrug back ; then searched about,  
Found her basket, ventured out,

She goes a-  
marketing.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG (POET OF TO-DAY)

Snecked the door and paused to lock it  
And plunge the key in some deep pocket.  
Then as she tripped demurely down                  25  
The steep descent, the little town  
Spread wider till its sprawling street  
Enclosed her and her footfalls beat  
On hard stone pavement, and she felt  
Those throbbing ecstasies that melt                  30  
Through heart and mind, as, happy,  
    free,  
Her small, prim personality  
Merged into the seething strife  
Of auction-marts and city life.

She visits  
the Boot-  
maker.

Serenely down the busy stream                  35  
Miss Thompson floated in a dream.  
Now, hovering bee-like, she would stop  
Entranced before some tempting shop,  
Getting in people's way and prying  
At things she never thought of buying :          40  
Now wafted on without an aim,  
Until in course of time she came  
To Watson's bootshop. Long she pries  
At boots and shoes of every size—  
Brown football-boots with bar and stud          45  
For boys that scuffle in the mud,  
And dancing-pumps with pointed toes  
Glossy as jet, and dull black bows ;  
Slim ladies' shoes with two-inch heel  
And sprinkled beads of gold and steel—          50

## MISS THOMPSON GOES SHOPPING

"How anyone can wear such things!"

On either side the doorway springs

(As in a tropic jungle loom

Masses of strange thick-petalled bloom

And fruits mis-shapen) fold on fold 55

A growth of sand-shoes rubber-soled,

Clambering the door-posts, branching, spawning  
ing

Their barbarous bunches like an awning

Over the windows and the doors.

But, framed among the other stores, 60

Something has caught Miss Thompson's eye

(O worldliness! O vanity!)

A pair of slippers—scarlet plush.

Miss Thompson feels a conscious blush

Suffuse her face, as though her thought 65

Had ventured further than it ought.

But O that colour's rapturous singing

And the answer in her lone heart ringing!

She turns (O Guardian Angels, stop her

From doing anything improper!) 70

She turns; and see, she stoops and bungles

In through the sand-shoes' hanging jungles,

Away from light and common sense,

Into the shop dim-lit and dense

With smells of polish and tanned hide. 75

Soon from a dark recess inside

Fat Mrs. Watson comes slip-slop

To mind the business of the shop.

Mrs.  
Watson.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG (POET OF TO-DAY)

- She walks flat-footed with a roll—  
A serviceable, homely soul, 80  
With kindly, ugly face like dough,  
Hair dull and colourless as tow.  
A huge Scotch pebble fills the space  
Between her bosom and her face.  
One sees her making beds all day. 85  
Miss Thompson lets her say her say :  
“ So chilly for the time of year.  
It’s ages since we saw you here.”  
Then, heart a-flutter, speech precise,  
Describes the shoes and asks the price. 90  
“ Them, Miss ? Ah, them is six-and-nine.”  
Miss Thompson shudders down the spine  
(Dream of impossible romance).  
She eyes them with a wistful glance,
- Wrestles  
with a  
Tempta-  
tion : 95  
For half a minute and no less  
Miss Thompson strives with seven devils,  
Then, soaring over earthly levels,  
Turns from the shoes with lingering touch—  
“ Ah, six-and-nine is far too much. 100  
Sorry to trouble you. Good day ! ”
- And is  
saved.
- She visits  
the Fish-  
monger. 105  
A little further down the way  
Stands Miles’s fish-shop, whence is shed  
So strong a smell of fishes dead  
That people of a subtler sense  
Hold their breath and hurry thence.

## MISS THOMPSON GOES SHOPPING

Miss Thompson hovers there and gazes :  
Her housewife's knowing eye appraises  
Salt and fresh, severely cons  
Kippers bright as tarnished bronze :      110  
Great cods disposed upon the sill,  
Chilly and wet, with gaping gill,  
Flat head, glazed eye, and mute, uncouth,  
Shapeless, wan, old-woman's mouth.  
Next a row of soles and plaice      115  
With querulous and twisted face,  
And red-eyed bloaters, golden-grey ;  
Smoked haddocks ranked in neat array ;  
A group of smelts that take the light  
Like slips of rainbow, pearly bright ;      120  
Silver trout with rosy spots,  
And coral shrimps with keen black dots  
For eyes, and hard and jointed sheath  
And crisp tails curving underneath.  
But there upon the sanded floor,      125  
More wonderful in all that store  
Than anything on slab or shelf,  
Stood Miles, the fishmonger, himself.

Four-square he stood and filled the  
place.

Mr. Miles.

His huge hands and his jolly face      130  
Were red. He had a mouth to quaff  
Pint after pint : a sounding laugh,  
But wheezy at the end, and oft  
His eyes bulged outwards and he coughed.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG (POET OF TO-DAY)

Aproned he stood from chin to toe.      135  
The apron's vertical long flow  
Warped grandly outwards to display  
His hale, round belly hung midway,  
Whose apex was securely bound  
With apron-strings wrapped round and round.  
Outside, Miss Thompson, small and staid, 141  
Felt, as she always felt, afraid  
Of this huge man who laughed so loud  
And drew the notice of the crowd.  
Awhile she paused in timid thought,      145  
Then promptly hurried in and bought  
"Two kippers, please. Yes, lovely weather."  
"Two kippers? Sixpence altogether :"  
And in her basket laid the pair  
Wrapped face to face in newspaper.      150

Reappears  
into Tempt-  
ation :

Then on she went, as one half blind,  
For things were stirring in her mind ;  
Then turned about with fixed intent  
And, heading for the bootshop, went  
Straight in and bought the scarlet slippers 155  
And popped them in beside the kippers.

And falls

She visits  
the  
chemist.

So much for that. From there she tacked,  
Still flushed by this decisive act,  
Westward, and came without a stop  
To Mr. Wren the chemist's shop,      160  
And stood awhile outside to see  
The tall, big-bellied bottles three—

## MISS THOMPSON GOES SHOPPING

- Red, blue, and emerald, richly bright  
Each with its burning core of light.  
The bell chimed as she pushed the door. 165  
Spotless the oilcloth on the floor,  
Limpid as water each glass case,  
Each thing precisely in its place.  
Rows of small drawers, black-lettered each  
With curious words of foreign speech, 170  
Ranked high above the other ware.  
The old strange fragrance filled the air,  
A fragrance like the garden pink,  
But tinged with vague medicinal stink  
Of camphor, soap, new sponges, blent 175  
With chloroform and violet scent.
- And Wren the chemist, tall and spare, Mr. Wren  
Stood gaunt behind his counter there.  
Quiet and very wise he seemed, 179  
With skull-like face, bald head that gleamed ;  
Through spectacles his eyes looked kind.  
He wore a pencil tucked behind  
His ear. And never he mistakes  
The wildest signs the doctor makes  
Prescribing drugs. Brown paper, string, 185  
He will not use for any thing,—  
But all in neat white parcels packs  
And sticks them up with sealing-wax.  
Miss Thompson bowed and blushed, and  
then 189  
Undoubting bought of Mr. Wren,

MARTIN ARMSTRONG (POET OF TO-DAY)

Being free from modern scepticism,  
A bottle for her rheumatism ;  
Also some peppermints to take  
In case of wind ; an oval cake  
Of scented soap ; a penny square

195

Of pungent naphthaline to scare  
The moth. And after Wren had wrapped  
And sealed the lot, Miss Thompson clapped  
Them in beside the fish and shoes ;  
“ Good day,” she says, and off she goes. 200  
Beelike Miss Thompson, whither next ?

Is led away to the Pleasures of the Town.  
Outside, you pause awhile, perplexed,  
Your bearings lost. Then all comes back  
And round she wheels hot on the track

Of Giles the grocer, and from there  
To Emilie the milliner,

205

Such as Groceries and Milliner.  
There to be tempted by the sight  
Of hats and blouses fiercely bright.  
(O guard Miss Thompson, Powers that Be,  
From Crudeness and Vulgarity.)

210

And other Allurements.  
Still on from shop to shop she goes  
With sharp bird's-eye, inquiring nose,  
Prying and peering, entering some,  
Oblivious of the thought of home.  
The town brimmed up with deep-blue haze.

215

But still she stayed to sit and gaze,  
Her eyes ablur with rapturous sights,  
Her small soul full of small delights,

220

## MISS THOMPSON GOES SHOPPING

Empty her purse, her basket filled.  
The traffic in the town was stilled.                          220  
The clock struck six. Men thronged the inns.  
Dear, dear, she should be home long since.

But at  
length is  
convinced  
of Indis-  
cretion.

Then as she climbed the misty downs                          And re-  
The lamps were lighted in the town's                          turns  
Small streets. She saw them star by star 225  
Multiplying from afar ;  
Till, mapped beneath her, she could trace  
Each street, and the wide square market-place  
Sunk deeper and deeper as she went  
Higher up the steep ascent.                                  230  
And all that soul-uplifting stir  
Step by step fell back from her,  
The glory gone, the blossoming  
Shrivelled, and she, a small, frail thing,  
Carrying her laden basket. Till                                  235  
Darkness and silence of the hill  
Received her in their restful care  
And stars came dropping through the air.  
But loudly, sweetly sang the slippers  
In the basket with the kippers ;                                  240  
And loud and sweet the answering thrills  
From her lone heart on the hills.

From *The Buzzards and Other Poems*